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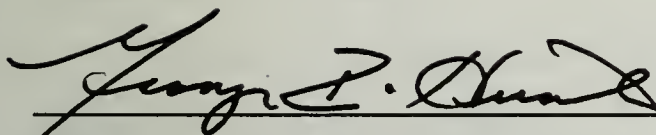




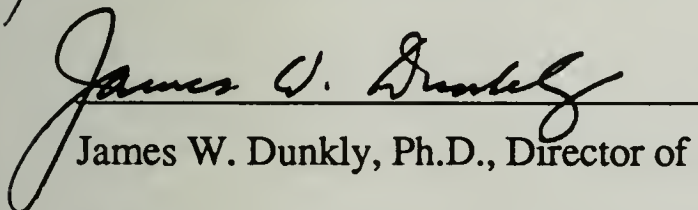
**Faith and Vocational Crisis  
In the Experience of Episcopal Clergy**

by  
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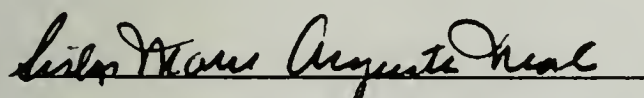
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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my wife, Esther, who has been my partner and support through bad times as well as good times. In the trials that eventuated in this study, she has had enough faith for both of us.

I began this study out of my own experience of being needy, and after many conversations which confirmed my suspicions that I had not been all alone—that in fact many clergy have experienced crisis and have been needy of care.

My research method included mailing out a survey to some two hundred clergy—graduates of the Episcopal Divinity School and its precursor institutions, the Episcopal Theological School and the Philadelphia Divinity School, in a series of classes over a thirty-year span. The sixty-some responses which came back put me in touch with many wonderful, caring, genuine clergy, most of whom have experienced crisis in their lives and have grown through it. I marvel at God's grace, I thank God for these great people—God's ministers truly, and for this project which has occasioned my coming to know them in this way.

As well, then, I dedicate this Thesis as a tribute to them all, my brothers and sisters in the ministry of Christ.



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## Introduction

This project-thesis arises out of my personal experience in parish ministry, and from many conversations with others, both clergy and laity who care about clergy.

The truism that clergy are human includes the fact that clergy are just as prone to suffer the kind of life-crisis that other people suffer as they face the change of perspective of the second half of life. With clergy, however, this crisis has some dimensions that are not as common with other people. This will be described in these pages.

The point of view from which this thesis proceeds is that life-crisis will not be prevented by excellent formation early in a person's ordained life, but that good early formation could mitigate some of the worst effects in later years. This will be treated at some length in this thesis.

Secondly, the Church has a role to play in taking care of its ministers—caring for the care-givers. Appropriate care for the clergy at all stages of their active lives is the Church's duty because clergy are brothers and sisters in the human family, and sisters and brothers in Christ as well. Appropriate care also serves the Church's interests of effective ministry. Exploring what 'appropriate care' might mean will be discussed at some length in this thesis.

The method of procedure of this thesis will be to present a picture of what is involved in the mid-life crisis, with particular attention to the special ways clergy may be affected. This will be Chapter 1. In doing my research I sent out a survey questionnaire to over two hundred clergy, graduates of the Episcopal Divinity School and its precursors, the Episcopal Theological School and the Philadelphia Divinity School, from selected classes over a span of thirty years. More than sixty responses (better than 30%) were received back.<sup>1</sup> From these responses we will look at stories of crisis in

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<sup>1</sup>To be precise, 210 questionnaires were sent out. The survey was sent to all the degree recipients who are now priests of the Episcopal Church in the USA, in the classes of 1962, 1967, 1972, 1977, 1982, and 1987—thus, at five-year intervals over the thirty-year span. Working up the database involved consulting between the EDS Alumni/æ list, the Episcopal Church Annual, and the Clerical Directory. It was my intention to include everyone in the survey who belongs in the category "degree recipients who are now priests of the





Chapter 2, and what respondents say about formation for ministry in Chapter 3. My conclusions form Chapter 4. A few respondents gave some account of where they are now, spiritually: what they say about life after the crisis forms the Epilogue. The survey questionnaire, followed by the tabulation of responses to it, forms Appendix A; and a bibliography of recent publications of practical theology in congregational studies is included as Appendix B.

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Episcopal Church in the USA.” In some of the cases where postal addresses vary among these three sources, I may have guessed wrong: seven were returned by the Postal Service (“Forwarding Order Expired” or otherwise undeliverable). One was returned as “deceased.” I received 68 (or 33.66%) responses to Part I of the survey; there were 20 narrative responses, mostly in direct response to Part II or the survey, but a few less specific letters. Thus, the responses on which this thesis draws most heavily represent some 9.9% of the survey.



## CHAPTER I.

### Mid-life Crisis in the Lives of Clergy

In this chapter my aim is to describe the particular ways the mid-life crisis affects clergy. Some stories of crisis from respondents to my survey questionnaire—and my own—are set out in Chapter 2, and we will see that they describe what is most easily accessible: events, actions and people as they form the story of a tough time in life. I believe that those events have an inner dimension, that the soul (or psyche) is not passive but itself plays a part in the story. We carry ourselves into every part of our life-story, and we initiate and respond to events out of the inner life of our souls, even when we are not very aware of what is going on in our inner world. So my attention in this chapter is on the inner dimension of the mid-life transition—why the transition comes about, why it can become a crisis, and how it feels for clergy in particular. Thus I begin, not with the stories of what happened, but with that inner dimension where we construct meaning to account for our experience.

In the questionnaire I asked the question of meaning. “The most sensitive part of [a crisis experience] is what it comes to mean as a part of your life story. In fact, it is not fully human and personal until we can attribute meaning to it.” The question of meaning was purposely left open-ended, because it is only fair that respondents be left free to honor their experience and their reflection on it in whatever terms they have appropriated. Each respondent should be free to say what he or she calls a ‘crisis.’ The experience has its particular dimensions and circumstances—its own story—for each individual. Further, reflection on the raw data will be flavored by the framework and terminology each has at his or her disposal. For some, this might be in terms of addiction and recovery; for others it might be in terms of psychology or life-stage research. For others yet, another meaning system may provide the terms and frame by which to make sense of one’s raw experience.

The topic and perspective of this thesis, however, is the mid-life crisis as it is played out in the lives of clergy. My experience leads me to think that the mid-life crisis





is very specially affecting for clergy, and I will say why I think that. Some respondents to the survey rightly understood my intent and stated that they had not experienced a mid-life crisis. Some others briefly indicated crises that, while undoubtedly troubling and painful, do not seem to fall within the material of this thesis. I salute them all and pray for their well-being and perseverance in ministry.

Of course, the point of view from which I proceed is influenced by my temperament. Keirsey and Bates, in their little book, *Please Understand Me*,<sup>1</sup> are astonishingly accurate in describing the kind of temperament I am blessed/cursed with: the NF ('intuitive feeler') personality. In describing four basic temperaments, Keirsey and Bates focus on the perceiving and judging functions of the personality as Jung hypothesized and Myers-Briggs went on to identify in their 'inventory.' They take these functions as determinative, whether the person is introverted or extraverted. The NF temperament, they say, "experiences life as a drama, each encounter pregnant with significance," "works toward a vision of perfection," will often "romanticize [his or her] experiences, [his or her life], and the experiences and lives of others," and "enjoys bringing out the best in others." Only a small minority (12%) of the general populace has this kind of temperament, so some of this essay may seem overly dramatic to the reader, making too much of what might be taken as 'ordinary' by many people.

Still, according to Keirsey and Bates, clergy are much more likely to have this kind of temperament than is the general populace. If I take it upon myself to describe the mid-life crisis as I see it, I may be speaking somewhat for others as well. The effort will not be wasted if those who do not experience life in such dramatic ways can see how some of us do experience it. For example, one respondent to my survey, who is a bishop, stated that "for whatever reason, I have not gone through a vocational crisis, or a mid-life 'dark wood' experience." I do not suppose that, because he has not had an experience similar to mine, he is lacking in compassion toward his clergy; but it may be helpful to him and to others to know how some of us see our lives. The same respondent later says, "Clergy—being human—can find a crisis anywhere. Life is a crisis! They need help identifying the crisis—naming it." If this study goes any distance in

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<sup>1</sup>Keirsey and Bates (1978), pp. 57-66.



helping clergy name what is happening in their lives, it will have been worthwhile.

My experience urges me to insist on the reality of the midlife transition as a change of focus, and to the crisis nature of this transition for some people. Clergy, in common with other people, can feel this transition as a crisis. It is not necessarily a crisis of one's sanity, nor is it necessarily morally reprehensible or a weakness of faith. To our fellow clergy it should invite compassion and perhaps some manner of intervention, gentle but firm and purposeful. To bishops and other diocesan judicatory officials it calls for compassion—first—and for some appropriate intervention. Some suggestions will be proposed later for the shape this intervention might take.

William James found that some people, whom he called the “healthy-minded,” go through life smoothly and without noticeable crisis.<sup>2</sup> Generally, I suppose clergy would like to place themselves among these “healthy-minded”—in spite of Jesus' repeated call to conversion and his explicit ministry to “those who are sick” rather than to “those who are well” (Mt. 9.12 ||). If we follow James' terminology, however, some of us must place ourselves among those he called the “sick-minded”—those for whom conversion involves a life-crisis.

James was not specifically researching the problems of midlife—specific notice of the midlife phenomena would wait for others' researches—but many of us have carried his terminology and distinctions from our education into our interpretations of our own and others' lives. It is time to revise radically our acceptance of James' term “sick,” for our response to this call to conversion at mid-life—in ourselves or in our fellows—will be wrong if the term persists.

Understandably, people have some reticence in acknowledging the full weight of the crisis experience—both natural reticence about indiscriminate sharing of personal stories and from not wanting to seem pre-occupied with one's problems. Additionally, although there is a growing body of research on the midlife transition, not to mention significant literature in fiction that is clearly an effort to explore this experience,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Studzinski (1985), p. 59.

<sup>3</sup>Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, and *The Heart of the Matter*, and Irwin Shaw's *Acceptable Losses* come easily to mind.





the terms of discourse on such a difficult subject are not necessarily part of our intellectual equipment, even for professional pastoral purposes.

My suggestion is that the conversion experience of midlife, if experienced as crisis, is particularly troubling and upsetting in the lives of clergy. For a call to conversion, coming at midlife to someone who has answered the earlier call to conversion, does not feel like a call to conversion. Instead, it feels like the collapse of one's earlier faith, calling into question whether that faith was real, whether that God in whom one had trusted—had indeed bet one's life upon—even *is*. It is some comfort that some Psalms and other parts of the Bible wrestle with a similar desolation, but the darkness of this night can still be overwhelming. This is, above all, the reason that for clergy the mid-life crisis becomes a crisis of faith and of vocation.

Although we would like to discount it, it strikes at the heart of our vocation and profession. For we are professionally engaged and invested in religion and in its promotion and nurture. Because the religion we profess makes claims about the meaning of life, a crisis of faith (which involves a crisis of meaning) strikes us at the very core of our life, faith, and vocation. We are under obligation to proclaim to others what may for ourselves have become uncertain—or worse. What for many laity is more toward the fringes of life is for us central, and indeed involves both our very livelihood and our personal integrity. Thus, Studzinski writes with particular concern for clergy—as well as those devoted laity—

who are in anguish over the stormy journey of midlife transition. They are those dedicated individuals within the churches today who have sincerely tried to use religious beliefs as a framework for their lives. They sometimes hold positions of leadership in society as well as in the church. Their situation is often made more difficult because they are held up as models of stability. When they experience internal upheaval in the middle of life, their first reaction is to disappear quietly from the scene in order to sort things out. Often, however, they feel constrained to stay with their current responsibilities. They may strive to cover up the rupture which exists between what they do in a stable church and what they are thinking and feeling as persons who are suddenly adrift.<sup>4</sup>

As Studzinski hints, there is a certain flavor of scandal attaching to a crisis of

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<sup>4</sup>Studzinski (1985), pp. 3-4.





faith suffered by a priest. Of all people, it is supposed, the priest ought to be immune to it: many laity count on the priest to be rock-steady where they themselves are not. Many laity attribute the weakness of their faith to their having to win their bread in secular occupations. They feel a radical disjunction between religious and secular, between sacred and profane, and so they impose a radical difference between their lives and the lives of clergy colored by this notion. If only, they think, we could lead our lives within the sacred protection of the church and pursue a life of devotion to God and service to God's people, as the priest does, then we also could be strong in our faith. Although they do not choose to do this, they harbor the sentimental and romantic notion that clergy are—or surely ought to be—immune to the doubts and sins to which they themselves are subject.

It may seem to a priest in the midst of crisis that the support of the faith-community melts away, so that the priest not only suffers the interior crisis with its desperate questioning but seems like a leper to other clergy and to laity who had formerly been a support. The crisis of faith suffered by a priest seems to present a terrifying threat to one's companions along the way, so that one is abandoned and isolated.

From an interior and spiritual point of view this kind of crisis is the form the 'dark night of the soul' takes for twentieth-century active Christians. From the viewpoint of career ministry, it may be called 'burnout.' Further, it has many links with what we have come to call the 'mid-life crisis' or crisis of limits and mortality--which, of course, is common to many and not peculiar to clergy.

## **I. Jung's Contribution to Understanding Mid-Life**

The psychological research of Carl Jung and many of his followers is very helpful as a framework for thinking about the mid-life transition. Jung, above all his predecessors, is the psychologist of the second journey. His is a psychology of the second half of life. What he found himself engaged with is the integration of all the parts of the human psyche, which is the over-arching task of the middle and later years of a person's life. In bringing Jungian psychology forward for this study, it is only fair to say that I find myself to be unusual: only one or two of the respondents to the survey



mentioned Jungian psychology—although many of them knew their personality type according to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. I find this interesting, and even remarkable, since, in recent years, many books in the area of spiritual life and growth have used Jungian language and categories.

I use the Jungian frame in this thesis because, first, it seems to me to provide an accounting of the way a personality develops from infancy through the span of life—and through the vicissitudes of the journey—that does not in itself involve judgments such as 'healthy' or 'sick.' It sees the development of the personality as a basically normal and healthy process, even though the mid-life transition, for example, may feel horrendous. Secondly, it accounts for the mid-life transition in terms that relate with some directness to the way the transition feels. It is one way—to me, a particularly engaging way—of imagining the life processes of the soul. Although in these pages it may seem that I use it as if it were definitive, in the long run I regard it as descriptive.

#### A. The Archetype of the Self

Jung is known especially for his discovery and naming of categories of the functioning of the human psyche, which he called Archetypes. An archetype, it turns out, is simply a pattern of the soul's functioning, passed on genetically in the human race, which is available to be filled with personal specificity as the person lives and accumulates experience.<sup>5</sup>

Of all the archetypes he discovered and named as he wrestled along with his patients toward a second-journey wholeness, perhaps the most important is also the one that at first seems most obvious. It is the archetype of the Self. The Self as archetype, however, is not the conscious self we have been aware of for as long as we can remember. As it turns out, the conscious self, or ego, is only the smaller part of the Self; the other, larger, part of it is the Unconscious, consisting of both the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious.

When we entered this world we were entirely unconscious potentiality. We

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<sup>5</sup>"An archetype is a psychic organ, an inherited mode of psychic functioning present in all of us." (Brewi and Brennan (1989), p. 90)





were not born with a ready-made awareness of self and world as distinct from each other. Although mother and child became separated in the act of birthing, the child's self continued at first to be psychically associated with the mother. To the baby, mother is an extension of the self. Both physical and mental development continued, and gradually consciousness emerged to become an ego-self. The conscious self we developed was never the whole self, but merely differentiated itself from the unconscious. It remained—and continues yet—in relation to the unconscious. Anne Brennan writes:

There is always more to us than we know we are. ... We are always becoming more than we have been. All this is still the Self. The ego or consciousness that we have at any one time is always there in relation to the more, or the Self. This ego-Self axis is the relation of the part to the whole, or the conscious part of the psyche to the totality of the psyche.<sup>6</sup>

The process and program of the second journey is to work out this ego-Self axis in a new and more wholesome mode of conscious life. The personality one has built in striving toward consciousness is lop-sided; while it functions well enough in the world as we pursue the program of the first journey, the ego-self begins to become aware that it must bow to the greater reality of the Self. Janice Brewi says that in the second half of life

the conscious personality developed during childhood and youth is no longer the center of the stage. One's monarchical ego is unthroned as the journey toward wholeness is embarked upon. No longer is the ego the center of psychic life. Like a Copernican revolution the individual finds that a shift has occurred: the Self is the center and psychic life revolves around it.<sup>7</sup>

As many of us can testify out of our experience, this awareness comes as something of a shock. That shock, and getting used to the new point of view, is what constitutes the mid-life crisis. For some people, the revolution comes more gradually and without a crisis. Value judgments such as 'good' and 'bad,' 'healthy-minded' and 'sick-minded,' are to be avoided. The point is that, in one way or another, wholeness is the goal toward which the self is working.

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<sup>6</sup>Brewi and Brennan (1989), p. 91.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25. Reference to Jung (1939), *The Integration of the Personality*, p. 4. Translated by Stanley Dell. New York, Farrar and Rinehart.



Jung used the term 'individuation' to signify the wholeness toward which the soul is aiming. 'Individuation' simply means becoming an individual person, with all that means in a human social context. That is, becoming individual, we do not become grandly self-existent or self-sufficient. To the contrary, we become what we have the potential to be, and able to relate to others as a centered person. In a Christian frame of reference, this also means fulfilling the thought of God for us, becoming what we are called to be. "Individuation is becoming whole, reaching one's full potential, and surrendering to the reasons for one's very existence, one's reason for being, one's call."<sup>8</sup>

To posit such a wholeness of the soul is to embrace a vision of unity for the self, first, and then of the entire creation. It is ultimately an insistent monotheism both in the inner life and outwardly toward the created order. Whereas the various parts of one's experience, memories, life-stages, endeavors and relationships may seem difficult if not impossible to reconcile into a unified whole, the archetype of the Self stands as a symbol of just such a unity, or integrated wholeness of conscious and unconscious, toward which the soul naturally strives. The striving toward that integration is the specific task of the second journey, the part of a life-span beginning at the mid-life transition.

## B. The Archetype of the Shadow

A second Jungian archetype important to this study is the Shadow.<sup>9</sup> The shadow is comprised of all the parts of the personality or soul that are not directly available to the light of consciousness. Jung wrote: "By the shadow I mean the 'negative' side of the personality, the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide, together with the insufficiently developed functions and the contents of the personal unconscious."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>9</sup>"The Shadow is not only personal but archetypal because, while much of the contents of my Shadow are personal to me, the fact of the Shadow is a universal phenomenon."  
(*Ibid.*, p. 90)

<sup>10</sup>Jung, *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*, p. 66. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 89.





The shadow personality feels to the conscious self as dark and mysterious. On the one hand, this is because the shadow contains the opposite of each function the ego has chosen to make into a strength. It is all the leftovers of those choices. On the other hand, the shadow feels dark and threatening because it contains all the memories we wish we could forget.

As the consciousness emerges, some of the operating functions we are all born with seem easier and more comfortable in our environment, and we make them our preferences. The opposite functions are set aside and neglected, and thus become the shadow personality. Since these are the underdeveloped opposites of those functions we have chosen to develop, they are and present themselves as somewhat primitive—and all the more unacceptable for that. So the shadow feels sinister, not only as threat but also literally (from the viewpoint of a right-handed world): it is the less-cultured part, it is 'gauche'; and when those functions are called into use we are likely to be embarrassed by their clumsiness.

Jung said it is "the 'negative' side of the personality," with 'negative' in quotes because the shadow is like a photographic negative, the opposite of the self we know. As the consciousness of a child grows, the unconscious or shadow personality grows too, "duplicating in its flat, dark self every curve and contour of every inch of growth."<sup>11</sup>

If a young person in the years of ego formation—that is, generally from early childhood and into adolescence—has found satisfaction in taking in a whole experience rather than its details—the woods rather than the trees—then the choice is being formed for the intuitive function over the sensing function. Accordingly, the sensory function remains somewhat underdeveloped and takes its place in the shadow. If this young person also finds it easier to evaluate experiences in terms of a feeling response, then that feeling function is chosen as the preferred strength, and the opposite thinking function remains somewhat underdeveloped and becomes part of the shadow. While the picture is more complex than this—involving also whether the person is more at home in his or her inner life or related outward to the external world—this will perhaps suffice to sug-

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<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 90.





gest where the shadow comes from and what to expect from it. It is an inevitable concomitant of ego formation, since we all begin with the same raw material of human possibilities and then make our choices about how we prefer to use them.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, Jung says the shadow is, or contains, all those unpleasant things about ourselves we prefer to hide. The shadow personality feels to the conscious self as dark and mysterious, even as alien and threatening. This is because, besides the underdeveloped potentials we chose not to develop, it is the repository of many memories one would prefer to forget. Jung says:

The personal unconscious contains lost memories, painful ideas that are repressed (i.e., forgotten on purpose), subliminal perceptions by which are meant sense perceptions that were not strong enough to reach consciousness, and finally contents that are not yet ripe for consciousness.<sup>13</sup>

These memories make themselves felt during the mid-life transition, and can be very disturbing. As a necessary process of the mid-life transition, it becomes necessary to allow many painful remnants of one's past to come to the surface of consciousness, to be dealt with in the fuller light of adult perspectives. More will be said about this presently.

For many clergy, as the responses to my survey show, life-experience has included addiction to alcohol or drugs or both. Each person must answer for him/herself about the genesis of the addiction, but it may be said that very often it stems from the effort to avoid the pain of earlier life-experience. Schaef and Fassel state that addiction is a coping mechanism intended to control oneself and one's environment, to manage one's feelings by avoiding them. "By taking a drug or drink, addicts believe they can avoid dealing with what they are feeling, thinking, needing, wanting, or knowing."<sup>14</sup>

As an escape from inner pain, addiction may come early in adult life, and the mid-life crisis will eventually involve facing the addiction and its evils in oneself and one's family and work. On the other hand, its onset may be a first response to the fright

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<sup>12</sup>"As an archetypal component of the psyche, the Shadow is neither simple nor static. To have a differentiated shadow which is a negative of our ego personality is, as a matter of fact, an achievement of individual psychological maturation." (*Ibid.*, p. 90)

<sup>13</sup>Jung, *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*, p. 66. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>14</sup>Schaef and Fassel (1988), p. 66.



of mid-life transition. Those who responded to the survey and checked this item are aware of it and have been dealing with it; we may suppose that addiction is in the past for them, that they are in recovery. (Among those who did not respond to the survey there may be some addicts who are not in recovery and so did not want to respond.) For some, addiction bore some relation to the breakup of marriage: either it contributed to the divorce or was a response to the loneliness afterward.

It must be emphasized, however, that alcohol and drugs are not the only addictive 'substances' of choice for clergy. Like some other people, clergy tend toward the addiction to work, called workaholism. Schaef and Fassel are adamant about the seriousness of workaholism as an addiction, similar in basic mechanism to other addictions and just as destructive:

We see workaholism as an addictive process in which the addictive agent is work. The workaholic becomes addicted to the process of work, using it as a fix in order to get ahead, be successful, avoid feeling, and ultimately avoid living. Like all addictions, workaholism adversely affects families and personal relationships at home and on the job. It is a progressive disease that leads to death if not treated.<sup>15</sup>

One reason we entered the priesthood was that we wanted to help people. To be frank, this means that we have a need to be needed. There is nothing wrong or reprehensible about having this need. Only, we must be aware of our need, and manage it so as not to do injustice to ourselves and our families. If we do not recognize that we have it, however, we can be taken in by our own need. We can put ourselves too much at others' disposal. We can organize our lives around pleasing other people, to our own and our family's detriment. The result can be disastrous, as the boundaries between oneself and others become blurred. "When one has no boundaries, the self and the other become indistinguishable and any sense of self or true recognition of the existence of the other is lost."<sup>16</sup> It seems to me that this is detrimental to effective ministry.

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<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.





## II. The Mid-Life Transition

### A. The Loss of Life's Meaning

As stated above, the task of the mid-life transition is to begin the integration of the whole Self, a process that will continue for years, perhaps until the moment of death. The entire first half of life has been taken up with the formation and establishment of the ego or conscious self and using it to establish a life in society, a career, a family, a place in society, a reputation among one's neighbors and peers. The second journey begins when that construction of a life somehow feels no longer satisfactory.

Brennan writes:

At mid-life we know that by exercising our willpower, we have achieved a great deal. We have sacrificed for our values. We have been able to be relatively loyal to our commitments. We have overcome laziness and been able to stick to something and work hard. We have bit by bit put something together, no matter how successful or unsuccessful we or others judge ourselves to be. ... Now, just when we have finally reached this pinnacle, we must be shot down. How so? Mid-life is, they say, 'getting to the top of the ladder and finding that it is against the wrong roof.' [This] is the first interpretation of the mid-life crisis of negative feelings. It is also an inkling that one is feeling the need to start over again.<sup>17</sup>

The integration of the Self will not mean—and must never be taken to mean—forsaking the construction of the ego personality one has achieved in the struggle of the earlier years. Rather, it means expanding it to allow some development of what was previously undervalued.<sup>18</sup> It means, as it were, allowing that the house one has built does in fact have a cellar, and that, dark and dank as it may seem, it contains some treasures that could add to the richness of one's life. Some of those treasures can be brought up into the light of consciousness, dusted off or washed up, and added to the beauty of the house.

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<sup>17</sup>Brewi and Brennan (1989), pp. 97-8.

<sup>18</sup>"When one learns ... to integrate the Shadow into the conscious personality, the personality is leavened and it grows. One's life will be different but it will still be built on the foundation that has been there from the beginning. When one holds on until the opposites come together in some way that transcends the opposition, without losing either side, one becomes more real. One's lifestyle may look profoundly different (there may be geographic or career moves, inauthentic commitments may be exchanged for new ones); or, things may appear much the same on the surface. Yet, deep down, all will be new." (*Ibid.*, p. 98)



This analogy is an ego-centred image, and the process beginning with the first intimations of mid-life transition will not admit of following it in terms of taking a light down into the cellar and looking around. For the Unconscious resists the imperialism of the ego's invasion. The ego desires to conquer the dark with the light of consciousness, but the Unconscious will not be thus conquered. On the contrary, it will be honored and loved. This is the meaning of integration.

The mid-life transition begins more as an experience of discomfort. At the very least, it feels like a bad case of ennui, what in medieval ascetical theology was called *accidie*. People in the throes of this

find they are disenchanted with themselves and with all that is going on around them. Many have the sense of having reached the limits of life at what is only its midpoint. Boredom is often their lot. Reactions to this experience vary greatly with individuals, but many feel the need to strike out in a new direction.<sup>19</sup>

The entire first half of life has been taken up with the formation and establishment of the ego or conscious self and using it to establish a life in society, a career, a family, a place in society, a reputation among one's neighbors and peers. To the person in that first journey, this is the program of life. It is, indeed, what is appropriate in that stage, and no particular intimation of any change in that program is allowed to disturb us. When the transition begins to be felt, the program of life is called in question, and one feels disoriented. The transition at some point—whether at the beginning or later—may even feel like a threat, as the shadow makes its presence felt. It comes as a disjuncture, an opposition, a being engaged by a presence that might not be entirely friendly—and this from within one's own self. By mid-life the ego consciousness is well established, but the shadow personality has also developed sufficiently to engage the ego consciousness. Earlier than mid-life, the ego would have been in more danger of being swallowed up by the unconscious and going mad. At mid-life the ego is strong enough to engage with the shadow without being swallowed whole. However, faced with this very new kind of engagement, the ego is in danger of closing in on itself.

Brennan says:

It is the Shadow, then, as the unconscious parts of the personality that the consci-

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<sup>19</sup>Studzinski (1985), p. 2.





ous ego has tended to reject or ignore, which begins to emerge as a kind of number-two personality. Is it friend or foe? This is the mid-life question. Answering that question in fidelity to my Self, as the unique image of God that I am called to be, as I wrestle with it in each real situation that presents the question, is the spirituality of mid-life.<sup>20</sup>

One's initiation into this new stage of the life journey may come from within or from without. Perhaps it is truest to say that it arises in the depth of the dialogue one holds between the inner life and the external circumstances in which we live out our lives. That is, boredom (for example) is an inner response to life or to work, but may be revealed in a less-than-positive evaluation at work. In such a case, it is something like an elderly person's suffering a broken hip and subsequently falling: one may attribute the broken hip to the fall, whereas in actuality the break may be the antecedent cause of the fall. It doesn't matter much: whichever came first, there is a person with a broken hip to be treated. Contrariwise, a demotion at work may bring on a sense of futility and a realization of mortality that occasions a full-blown crisis. To the ego consciousness, it is not at all certain where the causes and effects lie in this transition, nor does it matter much. In any case, it demands our attention.

### B. Intimations of Mortality

The transition will always be disturbing, and it will always raise weighty questions about the meaning of one's life. Frequently it will come in some form of encounter with one's own mortality and the limits of life.<sup>21</sup> So the mid-life crisis is called the crisis of limits or of mortality. Sullender states that

As people pass over the mid-point of the life cycle and enter the later years, they report that they have an emerging sense of the limited nature of time. They begin to

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<sup>20</sup>Brewi and Brennan (1989), p. 92.

<sup>21</sup>"Confronted with personal finiteness and the inevitability of approaching death, many people are forced to reconsider how they understand themselves, what will make them happy, and what will give their lives continued meaning. For them midlife is the time when the past comes up for review and is re-evaluated so that they can arrive at more realistic expectations for the future. Some people handle midlife quietly and smoothly, others experience considerable upheaval, indeed a 'midlife crisis.' For all, there is a 'midlife transition,' a process or change which marks this period in life." (Studzinski (1985), pp. 2-3)





measure life not by how far they have come, but by how much time they have left. They come to experience life as increasingly limited. In the second half of life the future feels as though it is narrowing; it seems that there are fewer possibilities, fewer options.<sup>22</sup>

This can be a dawning realization, or it can be a profoundly shaking crisis experience.

Clergy have to deal with mortality far more than most other people do. Ministry to the sick, the aging and the dying, and their families, conducting funerals—all this is a regular part of parish ministry. We develop a certain professional distance from the painful reality of it that is both necessary to our own spiritual balance and can be comforting to those we minister to. We can become so professional, however, that we are simply numb. Then, out of the blue, one day it hits us and becomes real in a very personal way.

James Fowler begins his book, *Stages of Faith*, with a particularly vivid account of this encounter with mortality. He begins the introduction of the book with this encounter, to set the stage for his discussion of what faith is and how it develops through various stages. The experience happened to him when he was thirty-two years old. He writes:<sup>23</sup>

Four A.M., in the darkness of a cold winter morning, suddenly I am fully and frighteningly awake. I see it clearly. I am going to die. *I* am going to die. This body, this mind, this lived and living myth, this husband, father, teacher, son, friend, will cease to be. The tide of life that propels me with such force will cease and I—this *I* taken so much for granted by *me*—will no longer walk this earth. A strange feeling of remoteness creeps over me. My wife, beside me in bed, seems completely out of reach. My daughters, asleep in other parts of the house, seem in this moment like vague memories of people I had once known. My work, my professional associates, my ambitions, my dreams and absorbing projects feel like fiction. ‘Real life’ suddenly feels like a transient dream. In the strange aloneness of this moment, defined by the certainty of death, I awake to the true facts of life. ...

...[I]n the distancing of that strange awakening my faith, like my wife and children, seemed remote and detached from me. I looked at it as one might look at an overcoat hanging on the far side of the room. During those moments I was not *in* my faith. I seemed to stand completely naked—a soul without body, raiment, relationships or roles. A soul alone with— with what? With whom?

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<sup>22</sup>Sullender (1989), p. 43.

<sup>23</sup>Fowler (1981), p. xi-xii.



Not everyone encounters his/her mortality in as dramatic a way as this, of course. Besides, thirty-two is unusually young for such an experience. In its very drama, though, this piece of story-telling does present some aspects of many such encounters. It begins in existential fear and anxiety, a fear at the very core of one's being, wrenching and inescapable. It proceeds to notice the distancing from loved ones and one's life and life-projects. Further—especially relevant to the study of experiences of clergy—it also notices the detachment even from one's faith.

Mortality—the indisputable but normally unnoticed fact that “*I am going to die*”—is a realization that is lonely in its essence. It assails those meanings on which we have built our lives, removes them from our attachment to them, and sets them over against us like “an overcoat hanging on the far side of the room.” The loves, the efforts, the values, the relationships, the projects we have spent our lives building are all relativized and made mortal by the fact that we are mortal—“*I am going to die.*”

In the first journey of life it is normal to disregard most signs of mortality. Mortality is an abstraction, one may perhaps discuss it philosophically. Mortality happens to people—but not to *me*. The response of many of young people to the threat of AIDS is typical of the young: it is a threat, but it doesn't apply to me. The way many people drive their cars in the first half of life is typical of the same cavalier response to danger. There is danger, but I am immune. Then, one day, something makes us realize that “*I am going to die.*” Then life appears in a new color.

The bravado of youth is an early way of coping with the uncertainty of life, which we first became aware of as infants—initially in the dawning consciousness that Mother is not always dependable to do our bidding. Surviving infancy we learn to handle that threat by denying it. Then, when the abstraction of mortality becomes a personal certainty, the infantile fears come up again to be recognized and settled anew with the resources of adult rationality.

As [individuals confront] their own death, they surrender the fantasy of earthly immortality. This confrontation with mortality brings a person face to face with existential anxiety, a terror and fear that well up when one is faced with the limits of human existence. Yet it is in this largely unconscious struggle with anxiety that one can discover a renewed vitality for creative engagement with life. In one sense the





struggle is not entirely new, for the present phase in human experience is always connected with the dynamic, albeit unconscious, memories of the past. The terror which is experienced in the depths of the human psyche at midlife is a primitive feeling which has its roots in the very first period of human life. Its reemergence enables a person to deal with it with increased rational powers and to resolve the early infantile conflict more adequately.<sup>24</sup>

Brewi puts the matter in terms that all of us in mid-life can recognize, whether we acknowledge infantile fears or not. The realization that *my* life is limited comes as a shock, usually through some event; it may be an event in our life circumstances, or it may be an inner realization. Again, it is truest to say that it arises in the depth of the dialogue one holds between the inner life and the external circumstances in which we live out our lives.

Both small and great events can be the cause of one's kingdom tumbling down. The infidelity of a spouse, one's own infidelity, the death of a spouse, a divorce, children leaving home, an empty nest, children not leaving home, a promotion, a demotion, young know-it-alls moving into the workplace, the death of a close peer, the sickness of aged and dependent parents, the death of parents, a child on drugs, an unwanted pregnancy, sexual problems, the inability to throw a ball as you used to or to swim or run with the same vigor, a first illness, putting on weight, forced retirement—any of these can be the cause of someone asking, Is this all there is? Is this what I spent myself for?<sup>25</sup>

As I come to realize that my life is limited and that I shall one day die, certain kinds of questions soon present themselves, insisting that I ponder them. No longer invincible, I must come to realize that my life has limits before ever I draw near the grave. Self-doubt assails the person in the throes of mid-life transition. Daniel Levinson, in his study *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, describes the dilemma and the self-doubts that plague a person who has begun to feel the limits of life.

A man in the Mid-life Transition is troubled by his seemingly imminent death. He is beset even more by the anxiety that he will not be able to make his future better than his past. As he seeks to modify and enrich his life, he has self-doubts ranging in intensity from mild pessimism to utter panic: 'Can I make my life more worthwhile in the remaining years? Am I now too old to make a fresh start? Have I become obsolete? What shall I try to do and be for myself, for my loved ones, for my tribe, for humanity?' The worst feeling of all is to contemplate long years of meaningless

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<sup>24</sup>Studzinski (1985), pp. 35-36.

<sup>25</sup>Brewi and Brennan (1989), pp. 209-210.



existence without youthful passions, creative effort or social contribution.’<sup>26</sup>

As we begin now to assess the time we have left, rather than the distance we have come, questions about the meaning and quality of our life become urgent. Our first journey has begun to pale as the meaning our life, but what is the meaning we now want our life to have? It is in this questioning that a person might begin, for example, to ask “What is the real legacy—the spiritual legacy—I want my children to have from me?” In light of this kind of questioning, decisions need to be made and action taken to focus our life more intentionally than we did before.

The self-questioning continues when the older generation—parents and extended family—dies. This is often in the same period of our life. The death of our parents, and of parent-figures—aunts and uncles and our parents’ peers—leaves us willy-nilly holding the position of elders. To the younger generation—whether our lives command their respect or not—we hold life in trust, and we feel responsible toward them. For ourselves, the world is more empty with our parents no longer available for consulting or sharing memories with, and we are more alone in a deep existential way. On the other hand, we pass into a new stage of life, of generativity and fulfillment.

We take up the artist’s brushes and for better or worse leave our mark of life’s canvas. This new life stage can be the most productive and creative of our life cycle. But it will be so only if we are able to say ‘goodbye’ to our parents and not cling to them...<sup>27</sup>

In the first journey of life we set out into the world ‘to seek our fortune,’ as many folk-tales put it. We were active, we were setting about establishing our place in the world, creating a family and a career. The death of parents is among the events in which we shall suffer loss, and to learn to grieve. Sullender sees that this means not just one loss but a constellation of losses:

Yes, we know that we lost our childhood years ago when we grew up and left home. It seemed O.K. then. We were going on to something else. But now when our parents die, we feel as if we are losing our childhood all over again. Maybe we are losing our history. ... We lose our parents, yes, but we also lose something

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<sup>26</sup>Daniel J. Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man’s Life* (New York, Ballantine Books, 1976), p. 217. Quoted in Sullender (1989), p. 44.

<sup>27</sup>Sullender (1989), p. 88.





else—our childhood. We grieve for both.<sup>28</sup>

This passive aspect of mid-life adds to its discomfort. As mid-life comes we seem acted upon by events common to many of us. Further, in our inner self the neglected or rejected parts of the self assert their presence and demand recognition. The initiative is no longer that of our conscious self, as it used to be. The initiative has been taken over, pre-empted, by — what? Or whom?

### C. Settling the Past

The ego's first reaction to its encounter with the shadow is fear. The shadow seems to threaten everything one has invested much effort cultivating in the first half of life, and also its very obscurity evokes our fear of the unknown.<sup>29</sup> For some people one of the principal encounters with the shadow comes as the upsurge of the painful memories that have lain repressed and pushed into the personal unconscious. It feels like an invasion of the conscious life by the past which one had almost kept at bay previously. One may have learned to be generally philosophical about wounds received and wounds inflicted: I can manage my hurts, lots of others have suffered a lot worse; everybody makes mistakes, and mine are not as bad as some others'. But they will not go away anymore, they insist on being recognized and felt deeply. It may happen that some very painful event or juncture of events serves to focus our attention, at last, and make us aware of how hurt we are.

To begin to feel pain and fear deeply calls forth memories of pain and fear from earlier in life—memories that have to be felt deeply all over again, or it may even seem for the first time, and allowed their legitimate place as feelings without any judgment

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<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>29</sup>“These encounters with the Shadow are never an easy or simplistic affair. Yet, the word *Shadow* may give a name to all kinds of inexpressible new experiences of oneself that are totally individual. Trying to capture these very complex and subtle experiences in a word does place these sometimes frightening and always disturbing experiences within the horizon of human experience, and it is often infinitely comforting to know that one has had many Shadow experiences and is not ‘simply losing one’s mind.’ As one is contacted now by both the psychological zoo and the embryonic beginnings of new greatness within, the result is a kind of chaos. Only when the lion and the lamb have come together in some area does one begin to glimpse the kingdom within.” (Brewi and Brennan (1989), p. 92)



whether the feelings were 'good' or 'bad,' justified or not.

In reappraising his life during the mid-life transition, a man must come to a new understanding of his grievances against others for the real or imagined damage they have done him. For a time, he may be helplessly immobilized by the helpless rage he feels toward parents, wife, mentors, friends, and loved ones who, as he now sees it, have hurt him badly. And, grievances now against himself—for the destructive effects he has had on others and himself.<sup>30</sup>

Impotent rage toward those in our life who have abused their power over us, betrayed our trust, or simply were careless of us, has to be felt, now at last. It can be very disturbing to someone who has maintained a conscious posture of loving and forgiving, to become (it seems) possessed by these bitter feelings. This is a time for healing, though, not for fixing, and the feelings must be allowed their force until they abate.

Then there is the awakening when we begin to see our own past actions through the eyes of those we have hurt. Humiliated, we realize there is nobody else on whom to cast the blame. There is nothing to do but apologise, or make oneself ready to make amends if opportunity should present itself. Both as victim and as villain, we take our place in the long story of human evil, and it is a struggle to acknowledge that. Brennan continues:

It is hard to acknowledge that we can be unwittingly destructive. It is even harder to admit our hostile, destructive wishes toward others, even more intimate others. It is harder still to own our bitterness and hatred expressed in the cruel, disparaging, petty, controlling, hurtful things we have done even to loved ones and with sometimes frightful consequences.<sup>31</sup>

Many feelings that attach to one's particular experience call for being put to rest as the midlife transition begins. Youthful peccadilloes may return unbidden to the conscious memory, presenting the opportunity for a new realization of harm done to others or of the risk to life and limb one carelessly undertook and how it might have turned out otherwise. It is no longer acceptable to excuse oneself from this particularity since they are common to many or all others. Each one's experience is one's own, and must be acknowledged and reappropriated into the perspectives of the second journey. Taking

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<sup>30</sup>Roger Gould, *Transformations: Growth and Change in Adult Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 95.





the time to reflect on our experience, we eventually come to see that the first journey of life was essentially ego-centred. It was appropriately so, as we built our ego-consciousness, but now we begin to see the corruption of it in the childishness of our suffering and hurtful deeds.

Recapitulating, as it were, our earlier life and allowing these feelings from the past to reenter our conscious life, we begin as well to remember our very ambivalent feelings toward our parents or other trusted adults, left over from childhood.

In reference to our parents, most of us feel a generalized guilt left over from childhood. We all have long histories, filled with pleasant and painful memories. ... Just below the surfaces of our adult facades, there is still a little girl or a little boy that wants daddy's recognition or mommy's embrace more than anything else in all the world. And in the mind of that little girl or little boy, we still may feel that we have never quite earned either the recognition or the embrace. This kind of generalized guilt is almost universal with parents and their adult children.<sup>32</sup>

In childhood it was natural for us to regard Mom and Dad as gods. Starting out in this world we were dependent on them and on their good will; to us as small children they were all-powerful, able to meet our needs and to punish our misdeeds. Leaving home we let go of that, only to realize much later that it has in certain primitive ways stayed the same at the bottom of our heart. Part of the mid-life settling of the past is to remember our parents and our lives as children, and to forgive them for being imperfect.

A part of the normal developmental process is a growing out of this kind of primitive dependency or parental idolatry. In time we come to see our parents as humans. Like us they are prone to mistakes; like us, they cannot be everywhere at once; and like us, they are not perfect.<sup>33</sup>

Yet, it is a struggle to get to this kind of mature perspective on our parents, and not everyone does so. There may be some remnant of feeling wronged by our parents, wounded unjustly by slights or by insults or by outright abuse.

We all feel some disappointment in our parents. It's an inevitable part of growing up. Some people get this disappointment worked through before their parents die. Others do not and carry their resentment into their bereavement. It is hard to be

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<sup>32</sup>Sullender (1989), p. 81.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 84.



angry with the deceased when we're supposed to feel sorrowful.<sup>34</sup>

For some, "disappointment" may be much too mild a word, as the memories of wrongs and wounds are more extreme. For a person whose parents' treatment can only be called abusive, the feelings toward them may—and should—surface as a real rage. As the recent literature on abuse has emphasized, the survival tactic of a child is to repress the feelings of such experiences—even when it is simply an unhappy incident and not a horrible instance of physical or verbal abuse. The adult still carries those memories, submerged below consciousness, and in mid-life, if not earlier, they force themselves into consciousness for healing. This invasion of consciousness may come when the parents die.

Further, especially for the religious person, we begin to see how we have sought to identify with the highest and biggest power, God, in our own interest of being righteous and of controlling life's uncertainties. Studzinski wisely notes that with the passing of youth there is now something to be mourned and one's own eventual death is to be anticipated. This forces a person to come to terms with personal destructiveness and hate. The desire to totally control one's environment and one's future, frequently through a close relationship with God, the all-good provider, has proven to be unrealizable. Plagued by unfulfilled dreams and by shattered ideals, persons at midlife find that the enemy of their fulfillment and happiness is less outside themselves in other people or in situations and more within, in their own hearts.<sup>35</sup>

Other memories may arise too, of wounds we received and wounds we inflicted on others long after childhood, calling us to accept responsibility for our feelings and our actions. This is a call to conversion—again—to faith in the living God. It is a time to learn forgiveness—both of others for wounds we have received, and of ourselves for wounds we have inflicted. In being reconciled with our own imperfection, we can also be reconciled with others in their imperfections.

### III. Professional Life

In the questionnaire I asked further: "In terms of your professional life, how did your crisis make you feel?" One respondent wrote, "At the time of each crisis, there

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<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>35</sup>Studzinski (1985), p. 37.





was a sense of failure, powerlessness, futility, like being at the end of the rope.” Another answered the question in a word: “incompetent.” I echo these from my experience, and it is a terrible feeling.

A third Jungian archetype that is important for this study is the Persona. This is relevant to the question of professional life, because it is essentially the interface between the Self and society. Jung described it this way:

The Persona is a complicated system of relations between the individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual. That the latter function is superfluous, could be maintained only by one who is so identified with his Persona that he no longer knows himself; and that the former is unnecessary could only occur to one who is quite unconscious of the true nature of his fellows.<sup>36</sup>

The years of life-building between school-leaving and the mid-life transition are the years of settling into the functional personas that go with the various social roles of the life one has chosen. Jung took the word *persona* from the mask a player in Greek drama held in front of his/her face. The mask did two things: it identified the character, and it helped project the voice. Thus it mediated the character in the drama from the actor to the audience, and hid the actor's face. To us a mask suggests hiding behind something false and illegitimate; but as Jung saw it, the persona is not only functional but necessary for mediating between one's inner self and the world of social relationships. Brennan writes:

Personas are real aspects of our personality; they are real vehicles of our personality. A healthy person has several personas, and moves automatically from one to another. In one day he may move from husband to accountant to daddy to son of an aging mother to Little League coach to eucharistic minister to volunteer fireman to handyman around the house to ballroom dancer to erotic lover.<sup>37</sup>

Obviously, the various personas here listed are only partly distinguishable. If one really seems a different person from one social interaction to another—like Clark Kent and Superman—then there is a mental health problem that calls for attention. A

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<sup>36</sup>Jung, *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*, p. 192. Quoted in Brewi and Brennan (1989), p. 199.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 199.



healthy person will use the various personas to express different aspects of his/her personality and will not feel too serious a disjunction between them. In myself, for example, I can trace resonances between the role of musical performer and some liturgical aspects of priestly ministry: as interpreter of a piece of music I try to lead listeners into experiencing the music's feeling; as liturgist I try to help congregants enter into an experience of worship.

For a priest the persona includes the social role of clergy-person. Clearly society has expectations of the way clergy will speak and act—some of which are unrealistic or inappropriate—that clergy in their early years of ministry must in some way learn to consider in their dealings in society. In some types of personality, or out of certain life-experience circumstances, a priest can become too closely identified with the clergy persona (as Jung warned above), and become dysfunctional to that extent until it is corrected.

The truism that clergy are human includes the fact that clergy are just as prone to suffer the kind of life-crisis that other people suffer as they face the change of perspective of the second half of life. With clergy, however, this crisis has some dimensions that are not as common with others. For one thing, there is the professional and public aspect of a priest's life, and for another thing, there is the inner life that necessarily inheres in a regular dealing in things of God.

These two aspects of a priest's life are in dialogue. The professional side of the coin involves the administration of parish affairs—Vestry meetings, money-raising concerns, education of adults and children, and so on. There is, further, counseling the troubled, visiting the sick and shut-ins, pastoral visits to parishioners in their homes, and all such things. In some of these activities (though not in all), the quality of the priest's inner life is displayed, somewhat directly and somewhat indirectly, in the quality of his/her faith convictions. For example, over the course of months the preacher's faith will be displayed for all to see: the preacher's vision of life, what the preacher believes about whether God is, and (if so) what God's relation to human life and institutions is. The inner life and the professional life are in a more explicit and insistent dialo-





gical polarity in a priest than in most laity, and therefore the mid-life transition may well affect a priest more critically than most others.

This is not only a matter of ethics, as would also be the case with (for example) doctors. It is at the very core of ethics, at the very source of ethics in the deepest well-spring of spiritual life and imagination. At the same time, it is more explicit and public in ministry than in most other walks of life.

The overhaul of the persona will probably be a necessary part of the mid-life transition, and especially urgent when the transition comes as a crisis. As the interface between soul and society, the persona is a functional part of everybody's personality at every stage of conscious life. In the first journey of life we have established our ways of relating to others, ways that are more or less satisfactory and manageable. As part of the mid-life change of focus, one may have to adjust this interface to reflect more adequately toward others what one is coming to know about oneself.

In the mid-life transition the accustomed 'ministerial' persona may come to feel dysfunctional, and a priest may feel the urgent need to revise his/her ways of relating to others. An earlier confidence would have been projected socially through a professional mask that mediated that confidence. A professional persona that was 'imperial' may have been erected as a defense against vulnerability. As the mid-life change of focus brings vulnerability and a sense of the limits of life, the persona may have to undergo a thorough overhaul.

Considering the interrelations between priest and world, and the inner stresses of the priest's faith journey, the kind of society we live and minister in makes a difference. In American society of the late twentieth century many people feel adrift: it is a general attitude. In generations past, the world transmitted to people meaning and values which were traditional. People were encouraged by the world to derive meaning in their lives from religion, from national pride, from their work and from the family. In the present generation, these sources of value are weakened and no longer communicate or command allegiance as they did formerly. Most people do not any longer relate to the traditional symbols and beliefs. Besides, we live in an increasingly pluralistic culture,



so that the problem of shared values becomes more complicated. Sullender notes that more and more modern, particularly urban, people are experiencing an existential emptiness. It is a frightening thing to realize that one's life is essentially meaningless, that one's life is really insignificant and that all of one's life work counts for naught. More and more people seem to feel this way, and seem to be on a search for a more lasting sense of purpose and meaning.<sup>38</sup>

This seems a wonderful opportunity for evangelism, the church having an answer (for some, 'the' answer) to the hunger for purpose and meaning. Some clergy and some laity are able to make use of the opportunity, but we must reckon with the simple fact that there is no clear separation between church and world, between sacred and secular. The church gathered for worship is still the world, and to a degree we have still bet our lives on what the world bets on. Living in daily contact, social intercourse and professional ministry with such a world, it can be extremely difficult to carry forward the conversion to which one is called anew. The nihilism and unfaith of the world add to the difficulty of maintaining a personal faith when that faith feels very shaky.

The priest may also feel conflict between her/his idealism and the political and institutional aspect of the church. A serious disillusionment with the church as institution sometimes arises as an integral part of the midlife experience. Some research sees the conflict between individual commitments and organizational methods and goals as the cause of some midlife crises. Persons who consider themselves altruistic may find that the organizations to which they belong not only operate differently but also are opposed to personal value-orientations in significant areas.<sup>39</sup>

Several respondents to the survey stated flatly that clergy must become psychologically independent of the church, and more will be said about that in later chapters. Several clergy who have left church ministry, mostly or entirely, responded to the survey, and they generally showed that this conflict of values between themselves and the church was at least a contributing reason for their departure. Further, most of them say they are spiritually much better off and happier doing some ministry of service in the world than they were in the church. Some terse remarks suggest some lingering bitterness toward the church for having turned out so manipulative, controlling and hardened.

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<sup>38</sup>Sullender (1989), p.14.

<sup>39</sup>Studzinski (1985), p. 43.





#### IV. Inner Conversion

This chapter must close by returning to its beginning. In the survey I asked a further question: “How did your prayer/spiritual life fare through the crisis?” The biggest problem for clergy as they undergo the mid-life transition—what above all may make it a crisis—is exactly in the interface between inner life and world. If only one were an accountant or a mechanic or almost anything other than a priest, the pain would not be so sharp. The adopted *persona* no longer serves well. It does not serve well because the inner person feels adrift. Studzinski, we recall, writes out of concern for those

who are in anguish over the stormy journey of midlife transition... those dedicated individuals within the churches today who have sincerely tried to use religious beliefs as a framework for their lives.... Their situation is often made more difficult because they are held up as models of stability. [Although] they experience internal upheaval in the middle of life, ... [often] they feel constrained to stay with their current responsibilities. They may strive to cover up the rupture which exists between what they do in a stable church and what they are thinking and feeling as persons who are suddenly adrift.<sup>40</sup>

Regarding clergy, the dialogue between their inner life and convictions and the world in which they and their parishioners live can become exquisitely painful as the inner world is cut adrift.

It is of the nature of ministry to be ‘in the middle’—to be in some fashion mediating between God and God’s people. Moses was a mediator between God and Israel: he spoke with God face to face, and carried God’s counsels and decrees to the people. Jesus is the mediator who reconciles us with God. The priest cannot avoid being alongside the people but also speaking for God to the people. Being among the people and not different from them, the priest is “to nourish Christ’s people from the riches of his grace, and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and in the life to come” (BCP, page 531).

But suppose that the priest’s inner life and prayer have become intolerably painful, suppose that the biblical statements of faith not only no longer strike fire but even seem to speak of a God who no longer acts or speaks, who has become silent. Suppose

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<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.



that the Daily Office and the Eucharist seem trapped within the world of our religion—things we do but with the dimension of God's transcendence and grace lost in murky darkness. Even one's experiences of God in the past become matter for doubt: did they happen? did they mean what I took them to mean?

Theological questions resurface, to be thought out again from a changing point of view. One way to put this is a stanza from John Shea's poem, "A Prayer to Queen Theology:"<sup>41</sup>

What I mean is that  
tied between birth and death  
like Samson between pillars  
we push.  
What falls on us is theology.

With a light touch, Shea says something that one finds in mid-life. Tied between the pillars of birth and death, we moment by moment push death farther away from birth. When the roof caves in on us, that's theology! The opening lines of this poem recall that "...theology chases clarity / like a dog after a downed duck...", and the pursuit of clarity is characteristic of the first journey. But in mid-life it is time to reassess our personal theology from within the experience of the roof caving in on our head.

What this feels like can best be expressed in poetry. The feeling of oppression in mid-life is profoundly expressed in Thomas Merton's poem, "Whether There is Enjoyment in Bitterness"<sup>42</sup>—truly a poem of a religious man from the 'dark wood' midway in our life's journey:

This afternoon, let me be a  
sad person. Am I not  
permitted (like other men)  
to be sick of myself?

Am I not allowed to be hollow  
or fall into the hole  
or break my bones (within me)  
in the trap set by my own

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<sup>41</sup>Shea. "A Prayer to Queen Theology", in *The God Who Fell From Heaven*. Argus Books.

<sup>42</sup>Merton (1957), p. 25.





lie to myself? O my friend,  
I too must sin and sin.

I too must hurt other people and  
(since I am no exception)  
I must be hated by them.

Do not forbid me, therefore,  
to taste the same bitter poison,  
and drink the gall that love  
(love most of all) so easily becomes.

Do not forbid me (once again) to be  
angry, bitter, disillusioned,  
wishing I could die.

While life and death are  
killing one another in my flesh,  
leave me in peace. I can enjoy,  
even as other men, this agony.

Only (whoever you may be)  
pray for my soul. Speak my name  
to Him, for in my bitterness  
I can hardly speak to Him, and He  
While He is busy killing me  
refuses to listen.

One never knows how long “this afternoon” will last: the second journey is the afternoon of life, but this mood of sadness and anguish may last this afternoon or this week, or this year or —who knows? It is of the mid-life condition to be sick of oneself, to feel oppressed by what one has made of life, and especially by false choices and misdeeds, and to want to be quit of it altogether. Mid-life is a time to feel “hollow,” falling and breaking inside “in the trap set by my own lie to myself,” as the life we have worked for years to build becomes disoriented and collapses. And mid-life, as I said above, is a time to recollect and resettle old scars and old scores, to become painfully aware that one has “hurt other people and ... must be hated by them.”

Especially painful, for those whose vocation and profession is handling the



word and sacraments of God, is this: “in my bitterness / I can hardly speak to Him, and He / While He is busy killing me / refuses to listen.” For this above all poses the possibility that faith itself is part of the “trap set by my own lie to myself.” As I become less and less sure of what my life is about, I become correspondingly unsure of the nature and character of God whose witness I am called to be. Is God truly gracious, or truly vengeful? The God whom I thought I knew becomes wholly mysterious, opaque and distant, even seems to turn against me as adversary. And can I speak a word of faith to God’s people this week? Can I celebrate the eucharist with anything resembling faith?

“...In my bitterness / I can hardly speak to Him, and He / While He is busy killing me / refuses to listen.” If God has turned enemy, at least the poet suffers some action of God’s. Even that is better than the desolation that may come after it, the seeming total absence of God, the seemingly resolute turning away so that whether God *is* becomes not only an open question but an irrelevancy. ‘Negative attention is better than no attention at all!’ Better God should be “busy killing me” than to leave me alone to wonder if there be any God at all—to wonder whether the faith I have professed is merely a chimera, a self-construct to reassure myself against the darkness, a “trap set by my own lie to myself.” “Mid-life spirituality is a dark night of the soul.”<sup>43</sup> It is a call to reorient theology from within Jesus’ cry of dereliction on the cross.

Brewi captures the condition of one’s faith in the midst of this pain and anguish—so well that she must have experienced it herself:

In the wake of a broken relationship, shattered dreams, mental or physical collapse, lost joy and lost soul, painful betrayal, and a darkness never before imagined, one finds oneself without hope or expectation for new life, resurrection. One’s vision is blurred, one cannot see clearly, one cannot see beyond this pain, one cannot dream that any of this has meaning.<sup>44</sup>

Some of us have had to preside and preach at the Easter celebration out of the midst of this anguish. To be sure, an advantage of formal religion and a set liturgy is the refuge it provides against the chaos of such inner turmoil. But the very distance between what the liturgy says and celebrates, and the inner desert of one’s soul exacerbates the pain.

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<sup>43</sup>Brewi and Brennan (1989), p. 148.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 211.





The liturgy itself, with its poetics of faith, can become a cry of pain and desolation. And is there a word of faith in our heart to speak to the assembly on this, the central festival of Christians? Can I celebrate the eucharist with any last shred of faith?

In the heart of this desert of painful desolation there is a call to conversion. I said above that a call to conversion, coming at midlife to someone who has answered the earlier call to conversion, does not feel like a call to conversion. Rather, it feels like the collapse of one's earlier faith, calling into question one's whole life of faith. The reason for this is that in the first journey of life faith must answer the concerns of that journey. To the extent that the God of the first journey is served in the interests of what one thinks life is about, that god is an idol. Faith in this God will—despite the best theological training—unconsciously expect a life of faith to 'pay off.' For a parish priest the pay-off may be expected in terms of a thriving parish, or a reputation among one's peers, or some other (modest, of course) reward for serving well. One does not admit these expectations, even to oneself: conscious theology is much too well-schooled to own up to any such bargaining. How often have we preached against this very thing! But when the roof caves in we discover how angry we get at being deprived of our dues!

Sullender proposes that an understanding of idolatry can give us a way forward at every stage of life. He says that "...idolatry offers us a perspective on spiritual health that is relevant to every stage of life. At every age people have to choose between faith in the living God and faith in false gods."<sup>45</sup> This is certainly true at mid-life, for this is a time for reappraising everything and making a new start. It is a time to own up to and confess the primitive and self-centred—idolatrous—nature of our expectations. Mid-life is a time for enduring the darkness for a while, until a new integration emerges. For each individual this necessity will be different, and qualified by each one's experience, learnings and choices. As Jung says,

The transition from morning to afternoon means a reevaluation of the earlier values. There comes the urgent need to appreciate the value of the opposite of our former ideal, to perceive the error in our former convictions, to recognize the untruth in our former truth, to feel how much antagonism and even hatred lay in what until now

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<sup>45</sup>Sullender (1989), p. 34.



had passed for love.<sup>46</sup>

This call to further conversion is not in the interest of getting our theology correct (at last!), but rather in the interest of living what remains of life for us in a positive and creative way. It is hope, and draws us into a future. If, when we get to mid-life we tend to look not at how far we have come but at how much time we have left, then faith and hope can draw us into living a creative present and future, leaving the past behind us to live in the present with the God who lives.

Each time we experience a new loss, we are faced with a choice between faith in a living God that pulls us into the future and faith in false gods that keep us enslaved to the past. ... By grieving we let go of that past, or that which is now lost, and free ourselves to move into the future. There in the future, God waits for us, longing to make life good again.<sup>47</sup>

It is very tempting to leave this chapter on that note. It feels nicely rounded off with this quotation: an appeal to faith, freedom from enslavement to the past, and hope in God's good will leading into a fulfilling future, all this seems to put us into familiar and comforting territory at last. We have known and used the terms, the concepts and appeal of this passage for many years. After all the turmoil, darkness and desolation, do we not have a right to take some comfort in these familiar surroundings?

I do not say that Sullender is wrong in this passage. That last phrase, however, contains an insidious temptation. God, he says, who draws us toward our future, longs to "make life good again." Such an expression must draw the attention of our feelings backward, toward the fabled 'good old days' when we thought we knew what the program of life was. The promise that life might be "good again" appeals to the remembered (or fancied) stability of the first journey; it must evoke a sigh of relief as we find ourselves once again on familiar ground amid time-worn phrases.

That rest is not yet, and in our hankering for it too soon, there is the danger of settling for 'counterfeit destinations.'

Enduring loneliness and apparent meaninglessness can wear a person down to the point where he or she is ready to settle for anything and cut the journey short. In an

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<sup>46</sup>Jung, *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*, p. 75. Quoted in Brewi and Brennan (1989), p. 103.

<sup>47</sup>Sullender (1989), p. 35.





anxious desire to be freed of present commitments and without working through the various internal aspects of the struggle, a person may simply choose to escape to another place and gain nothing in self-understanding.<sup>48</sup>

Thus there is the need for careful and skillful discernment for a person who is negotiating among the shoals of this journey. The need is such that one cannot expect to have the objectivity necessary to evaluate the choices. With Studzinski,<sup>49</sup> I urge that a companion in the spirit is a real necessity on this journey, another soul whom one trusts deeply. Only in speaking of one's inner experience with such a trusted person can the new dimensions of the second journey dawn upon the imagination. Without some glimmering vision of a true future, false choices can hardly be avoided in the present.

Like the chosen people longing for the fleshpots of Egypt, a person may hanker for a previous way of life, even a return to childhood, in the hope that all will be blissful again. In other words, there is a real danger of backsliding during these times of transition. The pressure of change can bring out the best, but it can also bring out the worst in people.<sup>50</sup>

Jung says that the transition to the second journey means a reevaluation of our earlier values, and recognizing the value in the opposites of our earlier values, convictions and truths. He goes on to say that "not a few" people make the mistake of 'converting' radically to those opposites—resulting in both personal and social havoc. They make themselves just as lop-sided as before, only in the opposite way; and they have been known to throw away their professions, marriages, religious convictions and all. "It is, of course, a fundamental mistake to imagine that when we see the non-value in the value or the untruth in the truth, the value or the truth ceases to exist. It has only become relative."<sup>51</sup> These are among the issues that urgently call for careful discernment as we make our way forward on this second journey.

Theologically, the paradise of our mythical beginning is eschatological. It is in our future, it is our destination. The promise of return to paradise intends to draw us

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<sup>48</sup>Studzinski (1985), p. 19.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>Jung, *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*, p. 75. Quoted in Brewi and Brennan (1989), p. 103.



into a future that bears a relationship to our mythical beginning, a relationship of fulfillment to promise. The sense of it is that somehow we shall recognize the eschatological paradise because it will be the fulfillment of what we have already known long since.

In the meantime, we travel on as best we can, we do not settle down too soon.

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Eliot (1943), p. 39.





## Chapter 2.

### Stories and Learnings

“Midway in the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost” (*Inferno*, Canto I). Dante’s image suggests that many of us experience some form of crisis midway in our journey of this life. In our century Carl Jung, in his psychiatric practice and research, gives empirical support to Dante’s poetic intuition. Many people recognize the experience of the ‘dark wood’ and its personal meaning for them.

Before telling the stories of some of the survey respondents, it will be best to recapitulate the mid-life issues we can listen for in these stories. In Chapter 1 we saw that the mid-life crisis may make its coming felt in the depth of the dialogue one holds between the inner life and the external circumstances in which we live out our lives. Some event, strangely striking or stirring or shocking to our inner self, may be the signal that our focus on what life is about is changing or needs to change. We are called to a new integration of the self, signalled by an event or circumstance that brings us up short. We may be summoned to the second journey before we even know there is to be such a different phase of life.

As stated in Chapter 1, we may expect the Shadow, or Unconscious self, to begin to demand its share of attention, even of respect (the voice of Rodney Dangerfield!). We will look in vain for these terms in the stories to follow, for they are told from the outside: they are stories of souls grappling more with outward events than with inner changing.

One of the common themes of mid-life is the loss of the meaning of life, or a change in what we had thought life was about. As Brewi and Brennan put it, “Mid-life is ... ‘getting to the top of the ladder and finding that it is against the wrong roof.’ [This] is the first interpretation of the mid-life crisis of negative feelings. It is also an inkling that one is feeling the need to start over again.”<sup>1</sup> Such a view is not expressed

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<sup>1</sup>Brewi and Brennan (1989), pp. 97-8.



in those terms in these stories. Somewhat more continuity is maintained as priests tell of their experiences of having to leave something behind and what they learned from that. But life did turn out other than expected, and the self's goals did change. One of the ways we feel the loss of life's meaning is in losses of other kinds: loss of family (including child or spouse through death or divorce), of parents, of work—in short, the loss of the meaning to ourselves that we had invested in these.<sup>2</sup> We find this theme in these stories.

Another theme of mid-life is the consciousness of mortality. These stories do not describe this in terms of an inner dramatic realization. But we catch resonances of the limited nature of time, and of measuring life “not by how far they have come, but by how much time they have left.”<sup>3</sup> One of the ways we feel mortality at one remove, so to say, is in the loss of youth, of health, of family, or of work (especially through retirement, often involving loss of status and of friends).

Another theme of mid-life, sketched in Chapter 1, was the inner need or constraint to settle the past. This is a need to own, and own up to, one's past—both the evil one has suffered and the evil one has inflicted on others. The very process of responding to the survey was an exercise in owning the past, and some respondents touch on their own part in what went wrong. I did not ask, in the survey, whether respondents had kept a journal during the crisis period, but it is probable that some did. Several respondents speak of seeking help through counselling or psychotherapy, which normally includes some process of setting the past to rest. Several speak of addiction to alcohol or drugs, though they do not indicate what kind of pain the addiction tried to numb.<sup>4</sup> For those in the 12-Step recovery program, Step 4 is to make “a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves,” Step 5 is to “[admit] to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs,” and Step 8 is to make “a list of all persons we had harmed, and [become] willing to make amends to them

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<sup>2</sup>See Sullender (1989), *passim*.

<sup>3</sup>Sullender (1989), p. 43.

<sup>4</sup>Recall that Schaef and Fassel state that “by taking a drug or drink, addicts believe they can avoid dealing with what they are feeling, thinking, needing, wanting, or knowing.” (Schaef and Fassel (1988), p. 66.)





all.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, settling the past, including making actual amends where possible, is part of the recovery from addiction.

Finally, as the self undergoes or undertakes the process of integration that characterizes the second journey, one’s mode of relating as a professional person to the external world of society becomes disoriented and requires revamping. For many of us who were ordained a generation ago, there was a *persona* of the priest that to a large extent ruled our relationships with our parishioners and with many others as well. In mid-life I, and some of these respondents, have found that to be dysfunctional, and have sought to find a more honest and workable *persona*.

The purpose of this chapter is, first, to tell the stories of some respondents to the survey, in their own words. I have edited these to some extent, to maintain their anonymity (I promised them that), and in a few cases to make them more readable. After the stories, there will be some reflections on helping clergy during times of crisis.

## I. Stories

Some of us don’t think we have had a mid-life crisis, or haven’t thought about it in those terms. I honor what they say about themselves. One writes:

I may be living in a fool’s paradise, but I have not had, at least in my estimation, a real crisis in ministry. At least not one that has made me change my life dramatically. There have, of course, been bumps in the road of life and ministry and there have been times I have wondered if I made the correct choices along the way.

I suppose I have been most fortunate choosing a woman who has a knack of heading off a crisis before it becomes an unmanageable mess. She has forced me to look hard at situations and to think them through which may be why I have been able to avoid the major crisis.

This is not to say it doesn’t happen... but I have been fortunate.

As I stated in Chapter 1, everybody has a mid-life transition, but it is not a crisis for everybody. The transition takes the path dictated by the person’s history and state; if there are blocks to the person’s journey of integration, a crisis may come as the way to call attention to the blockage and get past it. Value judgments such as ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ ‘healthy-minded’ and ‘sick-minded’ are to be avoided. I am glad of this man’s good fortune, and wish him continued perseverance and prosperity. The quality of his marri-

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<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 227.



age relationship is of great value, and he knows it.

Another sees not one crisis but a series. He suffered two periods of burnout, and struggled with the effects of alcohol on himself and his family. He found that bishops are sometimes prey to social fear, and sometimes give helpful advice. And he has known some of the anger of Job:

This may sound a bit obtuse, but I can not see, in my ministry, any one crisis. A series might be better, learning to open up to my wife and children, considering that I was not raised in such a situation. Alcohol was a factor, having been raised in a culture that saw alcohol as necessary. Coming to grips with the possibility that I too could go down the tube. Throughout this my wife and children were very supportive, and our marriage was strengthened because of a new openness that occurred. The crisis that comes to mind was when I had to tell the congregation that I served that my son of a previous marriage (married at 18, divorced at 21) was coming to visit us. (I must admit that my bishop, when I began my ministry told me that I must never talk about this, when this event was to begin my search for wholeness.) The response of the congregation was positive. I could free myself from the guilt that I had felt.

I have gone through two periods of burn-out — where I felt unable to function. Both times were depressions. I learned through these that I needed to take care of myself. About four years ago I went to a psychotherapist in ——— for two years which really helped me to get in touch with where I was. Again, I should say that my primary support was from my wife and family. The bishop also kept tabs on my progress to some degree.

At the time of each crisis, there was a sense of failure, powerlessness, futility, like being at the end of the rope. As far as my professional life it made me see that what I was was more vocational in the real sense of the word. The facade of 'Priesthood' and the image it portrayed, were false. I was a human being, a child of God, called into the ministry of His Church because of my humanness not to be an image but to serve with His People. To seek the Truth is much different than simple honesty. I had to come to grips with my own pre-conceptions, and see them as they were in reality. As to the professional way of looking at things, it changed because as I was seeing my inadequacy, so too, I was able to relate empathetically rather than sympathetically, to the real needs of ministry.

As to my prayer/spiritual life, paradoxically it changed as I placed my life in a loving God. God definitely took over and prayed for me while I was in my times of despair. That may sound strange, yet it is true. My life in prayer took on a whole new attitude, away from form to substance. I came away with the idea that prayer was a way of living. During those times I felt abandoned, yet I knew his presence. I felt like Job in his words of defiance at his friends' rationalizing, Damn it! 'I know that my redeemer lives ...' Anyway, I was humbled and found God's grace through it all.

I would have to say that the focus was on meaning. What I often saw was a





church that did not practice what it preached. The gospel message was saying one thing, and the church was merrily doing its own thing. The gospel was being sacrificed for causes. Also there were also self-esteem problems as well as self-care problems.

I have used Myers-Briggs, and this did help me to understand a lot about myself being an INTP. What helped most was the 12 Step program of AA, not just as steps, but as seeing it as a major system for living and getting the right focus on life. It is very biblical and seen as a spiritual discipline is to the point. My wife and I took advantage of a Marriage Encounter in the early '70's, as well as Cursillo, both as participant and leaders. We also have been influenced by a positive charismatic element of the Church. All have been enlightening and important to us through the years.

As far as what I have done since about these issues, I no longer fret over them, many were resolved when I learned to accept my life as it is. There are things I can do, and things I cannot do that are better given to others. I take care of myself, and know the danger signs when I should seek help.

In regard to crisis management, the Bishop told all the clergy that it might be a good idea to seek psychoanalysis. Which I did. My wife encouraged me to seek help and this was very positive. I felt the Bishop was interested in his clergy as people, so I really couldn't say which was his real interest, me or the institution.

The only real suggestion I could give you in counselling clergy in crisis is to listen to them and help them sort out their lives. I am presently doing this with one of our new woman clergy who is going through a crisis. To help others to tell their story and to help them get to the truth demands much listening, and helping them define where they are in life. What the troubled cleric needs is encouragement to deal with their issues, and see them for what they are. I personally use the 12 steps as the basis for counseling.

The chronological order of some of the incidents in this story is not always clear, but we catch the theme of settling the past in his coming to grips with alcohol and opening up to his family, in the incident when his son came to visit, and in the course of psychotherapy. The periods of burnout, and the feelings of "failure, powerlessness, futility, like being at the end of the rope," signal that the ways and goals we had are no longer satisfactory, that a new journey is in progress. The breakdown of the *persona* is clearly stated for once ("The facade of 'Priesthood' and the image it portrayed, were false"), and that realization led to a new, more integrated and wholesome mode of being present to others as a minister. There is in this story the resonance of a good deal of spiritual suffering, of a 'dark night' in which there is faith in the midst of uncertainty.

This man has grown through his trials, to become a mature minister who can be



both compassionate and patiently helpful to God's people. His ministry to other clergy is something we can especially appreciate—the more so if I say he ministers in an out-of-the-way part of the world where most clergy do not stay long and those who are seasoned in ministry are few.

Some of us began our ministry careers after some years in another field—we used to call them 'late vocations.' That has some advantages, and the Church seems to favor this now, perhaps partly because church employment is so uncertain. It also means that some of the hard experiences of the beginning years of ministry may come during the mid-life period, and acquire some flavors of the mid-life transition. This respondent was past the age of 40 when this situation came about.<sup>6</sup>

I don't want to belabor or overstate the case of working with a passive-aggressive Rector. It is murder to wake up one day and realize that every pat on the back, from a man whom you trust, is an attempt to find a soft spot into which to stick the knife. The lies and deceit. The failure to connect and communicate. I was ill-prepared to see it through. I also am such a hopeless optimist I just knew it would get better — it didn't. Bereft of good judgement, I resigned. I must add, the Bishop was in constant touch with me throughout, and very supportive. He assisted me in finding an interim [position] and when the opportunity arose to begin a new mission, he supported me in that endeavor. I also had the support of my clergy colleagues who knew the situation. In addition, my wife and kids were super supportive. I never had to fear economic suffering, since my prior profession pays double anything I can make in the church. That was a Godsend. All of it a very humbling experience and one which, in hindsight, I can thank God for. But it's not the best way to learn!!

a) I learned I had to allow more time just to be and not do. I needed quiet, healing space. I had to learn patience and to trust God to bring me out of the burned up places. I had to trust the community of faith to reach out to me and minister to me. It is easy for clergy to give, much harder for them to receive. This giving and receiving needs to be held in balance.

b) I felt cheated early on. After all, I had worked so hard and given up a lot to become a priest. It was demeaning to have to go back into my former profession. But I actually enjoyed the work and it was great therapy to be so affirmed in what I had always done well.

c) I never blamed God for my dilemma. But I deepened my prayer life. I discovered I had been pretty dry and stale — mild depression will do that to you! I al-

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<sup>6</sup>The listing by letters—a., b., c., etc.—in this and some other responses, refers to the questions in the survey under heading number 3 in **Part II**. I have edited the responses that refer to this so that the reader will not necessarily need to see what the question was. See Appendix for the full listing.







so got back into regular exercise and that was a big help.

d) I had to focus on self-esteem and self-care. I was so deeply enmeshed in the intrigue, I didn't realize how burned out I had become. I found my eyelids in spasm — if that happens now it is an early warning signal!!

e) I think the Myers-Briggs stuff was best for me at the time. I also had to recall I had the best possible profile of health on the MMPI from my CPE days.... So I knew my basic instincts were correct and could be trusted. I had to look at the areas of Myers-Briggs where weakness could lead to trouble — sure enough, I fell in the traps.

f) I committed to parish renewal and revitalization, including a Doctor of Ministry Program out of McCormick Seminary in Chicago (Presbyterian). It has been fabulous and given me life skills which are integrated into the fabric of parish life. I also have participated heavily in Congregational Development, the NCD work being sponsored by Arlin Rothauge of Executive Board Development Office. Exciting, rejuvenating and some of the hardest work I've ever done, but I love it. Lots of affirmation.

g) No formal intervention, just lots of folks helping out when the shit hit the fan and slightly before. I must say the Bishop tended to want to preserve the institutional aspects but also wanted me healed. That must be tough for caring bishops! I only knew the status quo was a big problem and was largely responsible for lots of my problems. I also recognized how invested I had become in the Status Quo and had tried not to rock the boat by rowing like hell. That was a bad choice. Why do we insist on thinking we can fix dysfunction when what we need to do is focus on self care!?

The feeling of being cheated is one of the themes of mid-life, exacerbated here by the respondent having spent much energy, time, and money to answer the call to ministry as an ordained person. He does not say so, but his decision to seek ordination may have been part of his entrance to mid-life—seeking a meaning for his life other than he had already built and that was now feeling unsatisfactory. He “never blamed God”—but doesn't say whether he is aware of the ambiguities inherent in the situation. Learning “to allow more time just to be and not do” is a way of acknowledging that the program of life is changing from the activism of the first journey. “It is easy for clergy to give, much harder for them to receive” is an insight that many of us need to remember frequently.

An alternative way of earning one's bread is a luxury that many of us don't have. (One respondent noted that, having lost his church employment, he lives “on the edge of economic bankruptcy”—a taste of mortality that none of us wants, and that we



will never forget if we have known it!) We may—as this respondent does—sympathize with the bishop in this story, who apparently felt powerless to deal straightforwardly with a rector who was causing great trouble to others. The possibility suggests itself that the rector was himself in the midst of fighting a mid-life crisis, perhaps frightened at the loss of his youth, perhaps feeling threatened by a younger colleague, and in pain. At least this respondent enjoyed the support of his family and colleagues, and of the bishop in finding new employment. He has gone on to ministry elsewhere, and makes self-care and spiritual discipline a priority.

Here is another story of a curacy situation where the rector and curate (and the parish) needed to negotiate their needs and expectations but did not. This respondent is still too close to the situation to have the perspective on it that the last respondent has. Still, she says she is past the crisis and hopes for a new job, and I wish her well.

I was hired as a lay DRE, with the parish knowing that diaconal ordination was just a year off. The half-time position was “used up” by education tasks and after ordination, the diaconal, and then priestly, tasks of pastoral and liturgical duties were simply tacked on with no consideration given to the extra time needed and no recognition to the fact that these were, indeed, right and proper things for me to be doing. The parish acknowledged my change in status and in ‘being’ but the rector didn’t and the budget didn’t. So I was stuck feeling un-used, unfulfilled and unsure of my calling. The family was already under stress due to our daughter’s anorexia, so my insecurity both mirrored and escalated the family’s insecurity.

My mid-life crisis began with the call to ordained ministry and seminary and the changes that brought; was heightened to fever-pitch through the 3+ years of my daughter’s anorexia and seems to be coming down the other side as I begin to look for a new job!

a) This crisis has formed me as a more prayer[ful] person, a person who looks more carefully into her own actions and motives, a person who has developed better resources for bridging crisis ‘gaps.’

b) Professionally, I realize how very green I am, but how many strengths I have to use in God’s service. I’ve clarified what issues I will attend to first and what some of my professional/personal priorities are.

c) Prayer is paramount as I take care of myself and occupies more of my waking moments.

d) I must take care of my self—physically, mentally, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually.

e) As an INTJ I finally have a way of describing myself to others that they can grasp but as a female INTJ I’m rare and have to work to find soul-mates in ministry. But they’re there!





f) I'm continuing to apply the lessons I've learned through professional help (courses, counseling, etc), beginning a job search, meeting informally with friends in ministry and looking for and basking in joy wherever I find it!

We can hear in this story some resonances of mid-life crisis, as sketched in Chapter 1. She says her mid-life crisis began with the call to ordained ministry, but doesn't elaborate on how she felt or viewed that. In this story we hear the feelings of insecurity and loss of control over one's life, both in her feeling not appreciated and in her parental concern for her daughter's anorexia. I conjecture that the daughter's health problem brought on parental feelings of guilt—owning too much of it, feeling guilty for real or imagined 'neglect,' and so on. She says she has had group peer support as she began ministry; I hope she also had help through therapy together with her daughter.

Another respondent, also a woman, had a much better than average curacy, and then later found herself mired in problems in the church and her responses to them.

Arriving in ———, I was unprepared for ... the expectations that had been raised. While I could offer gifts in preaching and liturgical renewal, I had no experience in Southern expectations of untiring hospitality, hugs at the Church door, and a constant exterior congeniality regardless of my true emotions. I was sinking fast. Never to be one to experience the honeymoon that some clergy experience, I was however, not prepared for the deep negativity that was expressed on the very first Sunday.

... I was lonely, fearful, and quickly sinking into depression. At the suggestion of my spiritual director, I sought help from a therapist who had done a lot of work with women religious. She was superb in many ways, and I developed a very close bonding—transference, as they would say. She eventually terminated our time together because she left her practice to become a medical missionary.... This was a serious crisis point in my life, since I was working out so many things with her. In fact, her leaving opened terrible wounds of rejection and abandonment that were old and deep and sore. At her recommendation, I continued therapy with someone else. He has proven to be a God-send in many ways. Because of her, I was able to allow the wounds to be revealed, because of him, I am on the road to real healing.

Through this experience, I have become more loving of myself, more forgiving, and generous. I have learned to recognize my needs, and how to respond to them by setting boundaries for myself. In particular, I've been able to separate 'me' from 'you,' thus allowing the distance that makes it possible for me to identify things like projection. In the past, I received everything that anyone sent my way. I've also come to see that the Church will never be the mother that I didn't have in my youth—in fact, she's more the mother that I did have: consuming, insensitive, all-encompassing. The best mother I'm ever going to have is me.

These are hard lessons, and we all have had to learn them—though not always



with as much suffering as this. This is clearly a woman with great gifts, and willing to offer herself with her gifts to the service of God in the church. She had the courage and perseverance to seek help from therapy, and has come out much more mature and seasoned. On one reading, “the best mother I’m ever going to have is me” feels very sad because, again, the church has let one of us down—in fact nearly destroyed her. On the other hand, it is a declaration of self-care that augurs well for present and future ministry—so long as she keeps it a part of her dialogue with God in prayer. She is clearly in a better place for ministry.

One of the mid-life issues is the loss of family, and coming to terms with loneliness. Although the following story seems to come from the young side of mid-life, it illustrates this theme.

The particular crisis I have experienced in my life as an ordained person is that of divorce and the beginning of a new marriage. I had married at a relatively young age (22), and my wife and I encountered a variety of problems early on. I preferred to not see a variety of things, but eventually my wife and I entered therapy as a couple. This eventually developed into individual therapy and then I entered into a group therapy arrangement as well.

My wife and I found ourselves growing, but it was steadily further apart. We attempted a change of locale and various devices to ‘start over,’ and failing them all went through a so-called ‘no fault’ divorce process (one year delay from filing to declaration in the state we were located in) There were no children from the marriage, and consequently there has been no ongoing communication since the divorce finalized in 1982.

In terms of myself, I had to cope for the first time with real ‘aloneness’—no school or seminary community ready-made, no functioning marriage, a sense of being adrift and lacking meaning in my daily work. My career was in ‘neutral’ as we had moved from one place to another for her employment opportunity, and I was serving again as an assisting priest. But this time, my ‘boss’ was only a few years my senior, and a bachelor, and while certainly not actively giving me any trouble, he was likewise unsure what to do to be of help, and could not combat the loneliness.

My battle with loneliness took the form of adopting a dysfunctional sleep/wake cycle and a peculiar eating pattern. Eventually, this resulted in medical problems of a serious nature, medication, and a recovery process (although I was able to continue working throughout and was never hospitalized).

It was as I was coming out of that time period that a new relationship developed, which eventually led to a ‘happy’ stress period...namely, new marriage, move to my first congregation as Rector, and the start of a family in the new location, all







in 12 months.

The resumption of a family life pattern, and the beginning of having children as part of my world as a person, has inaugurated an extended period of finding life more fulfilling than ever before. I am, at age 41, still basically at that point, with the professional need to consider where I might next go from this current parish coming along in the next 18 months to 2 years (roughly, as the process is of course highly unpredictable!).

In this story the divorce made the occasion for facing one aspect of mid-life: the “sense of being adrift and lacking meaning in my daily work.” Some people do begin their mid-life transition in their thirties, especially when some stressful event like the break-down of marriage triggers it. I am glad that a new happiness in marriage has blossomed and that he “[finds] life more fulfilling than ever before.” The second journey of life may or may not require more periods of tribulation.

Another respondent also has a story of divorce, together with a great deal of stress in the parish community caused by some wicked parishioners.

The year was 1974, I had been in a parish in the mid-west that started out poorly. The search committee had lied to me about what the parish wanted, and I had lied to them about intending to go to Cursillo. Then three years into the ministry my marriage was falling apart—it had always been rocky. Also a couple began their crusade to get rid of me. She was outside of my office daily—yelling and screaming about the latest awful thing. He was constantly on the phone reporting his investigations of his latest imagined misdeed. He would come to Vestry meeting and yell and scream at the Vestry and me, and then go home and call everyone he knew about the awful way the Vestry treated him. I lived with this hell for three years. My wife left the parish after her own outburst over sexism in the liturgy. My marriage was dead then, but I did not recognize it.

During this period the parish, vestry, bishop, fellow clergy, seminary, presiding bishop, diocese all did nothing. The bishop would get crazy letters from this guy and complain to me about how awful it was—and then turn around and do nothing to help me—he was afraid of this guy I think, and I was too.

I learned a hell of a lot from that experience, all by myself. The Church offered zero help. I learned how to handle complaints—going public—resolving conflict immediately. When I did supply work I discover people responding to me positively.

My marriage ended in divorce—my wife left me against my will, without seeking any help, and it is the best thing that could have ever happened to me. She set me free from her anger at the Church, God and me (no connection between me and God).

a. [This crisis] meant to me that I had been flailing against the wrong straw figures. I had to experience healing of everything in me. I had to start over again to



see who my faith was in, what was important to me—and it has been a wonderful journey that has led to a happy marriage, experiences in Africa, successful ministry, and the knowledge of how to do my job.

b. The crises made me feel incompetent.

c. [My spiritual life] was lousy during the crises, I had no spiritual director. It is great now.

d. [The issues in my life that the crisis compelled me to focus on was] Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

e. [The frame(s) of reference that helped me understand myself and my suffering were] Myers-Briggs, Servant Leadership, Spiritual Direction, Eucharist, a community of love.

f. I am married to a wonderful woman. I entered therapy. I attended healing services. I pray constantly, Jesus is my Lord.

g. The 1977 intervention was solely to benefit the institution.

This respondent did not state his age, and 1977 may have been early for mid-life. Again, a stressful set of circumstances led him to his reflection that “[this crisis] meant to me that I had been flailing against the wrong straw figures. I had to experience healing of everything in me. I had to start over again to see who my faith was in, what was important to me....” These are common experiences of mid-life, of reassessment of practically everything that has significance and importance for us.

“I learned a hell of a lot from that experience, all by myself” is an angry statement, indicting the church for its ineffectiveness. Clearly, this was an experience of protracted suffering, yet the anger still evident in the telling of this story raises a question for me whether this man has quite finished with settling the past. (I note, however, that another respondent chose to write me a letter rather than answer the survey, because “I perceive [the questionnaire] encourages me to bitch and blame, which is not especially helpful. I bitch and blame easily and readily, for the most part.” So I may have led at least one respondent into that temptation!)

Another respondent relates some discouraging experiences at the hands of the church, both laity and bishops:

I can share with you two crises...

After about seven years as rector of a pastoral size parish, I began to have some serious conflicts with lay leaders over the amount of emphasis which I placed on outreach. For about a year I felt myself to be frequently under attack by a small group of very vocal parishioners. My wife felt that she could no longer have a friendly relationship with the wives of some of these men and avoided them as





much as possible. Parishioners who were supportive of me also came [under] attack.

I went to the bishop and the deployment officer and asked for help in finding another parish in the diocese. I told them that I was not interested in leaving the diocese, since it had been my home since second grade and I had a strong attachment to its clergy and lay people. Over a period of two years, my name was submitted to four or five parishes in the diocese, but only once was I called for an interview. Towards the end of that period, I sensed that there was no commitment on the part of the bishop to working to keep me there. Since we were, and continue to be, close friends, I never saw this as a personal rejection, but only as the product of a decision that the “marketplace” should prevail and that the bishop shouldn’t interfere.

At that point, I allowed my name to be submitted for two parishes outside the diocese. In both cases, I was interviewed, but not called. Both processes brought important changes in my work, however. One search committee insisted that they be allowed to talk with lay leaders in my parish and this produced some good conversations later about the possibility that I might move on. The other parish was, in many ways, ideal, but I came away from the interview with a sense that parish ministry was not appropriate for me at that point in my life, a conclusion which members of the search committee reached as well.

Within a few months, I accepted an invitation to serve on a diocesan staff. One question which this experience has raised for me is what value is there to a diocese in working to keep priests. Even though it might have been inappropriate for me to have been called to any other parish in that diocese, what might the bishop and his staff have done to help me to stay in the parish and deal with the conflicts? Might not the Church have benefitted by helping me and the leadership of the parish move on to a new chapter? I don’t have clear answers, but my sense is that even with the best will, dioceses have not provided the kinds of resources needed for productive long term rectorates.

My second crisis came this year when my bishop decided, with minimal consultation, to restructure his staff and let two priests go. In my case, he also had some dissatisfaction with my work, but had never shared it with me in my annual performance review. While I have been able to find work as an interim, my future direction is very unclear. When I left parish work three years ago, I had no intention of returning. Even though I am enjoying my work as an interim, I am not sure that I want to return to parish work permanently. I would prefer a diocesan position, but I am wary about taking a job which could end so suddenly and without warning. My wife has had a real crisis of faith because of this and it has added to our adolescent daughter’s already growing disillusionment with the Church. I have felt at moments freed by the bishop’s decision to explore employment options outside the Church, especially since my family would like to stay in the area, but I am aware of some of the financial factors which would encourage me to seek employment within the Church, e.g., the CPF and the fact that at 45 I’m paid a lot better in the Church than I would be starting out in some new career....





I for one resonate with the disillusionment and discouragement expressed in this story. In clergy gatherings one often hears expressions of cynicism about the way the Church wastes talent and experience; those expressions come easily from the lips of those who are employed, but when one is jobless it is a frightful and urgent and maddening matter. This is a thoughtful and able priest who has run afoul of the church's often-dysfunctional employment 'marketplace.' Has he done his mid-life work of beginning a new integration? Perhaps it is only just beginning with this last crisis, and he will have to pay more attention to inward reflection and less to 'the system' and other external circumstances.

Another respondent writes that he found his bishop to be very supportive:

My relationship with my lovely and competent secretary moved from friendship to something more than that. We were both vulnerable. She was unhappy in her marriage. I filled a vacuum. I truly cared deeply for her and it almost wrecked my marriage. However, we terminated the relationship, both realizing what it was doing and the consequences for me. She is now married and is very happy. She lives in another state.

Clergy are human just like everyone else. My wife and I have worked very hard at reclaiming our relationship and our marriage. We both had and have a deep commitment to each other — that is what almost tore me apart. Truly, no one can serve two masters. Our marriage is stronger and more insightful now. Also, we appreciate what we have and almost lost. We both believe that God heard our prayers for all of us involved.

Because of this experience, I am very much less judgmental with regard to the personal and emotional struggles people have, able to deal pastorally and not judgmentally with human failings.

What the experience of finding myself in the 'dark wood' meant. Well, I certainly came to feel a deep empathy for an understanding of those experiencing emotional crisis and spiritual desolation and despair. I kept repeating over and over Henry Newman's hymn 'Lead, kindly light, amid the encroaching gloom, lead thou me on. The way is dark and I am far from home. Lead thou me on o'er moor and fen until the night is gone. And with the dawn, those Angel faces smile, which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.'

Professional life. I would have to say, looking back now, that I felt isolated. It wasn't, obviously, something one could share with friends and colleagues. It was such a very, very heavy burden to bear and carry.

On the other hand, I felt a sense of oneness with those who had experienced the death and loss of a loved one: 'I know how you feel.' No, until you have experienced the loss of someone you love, you *don't* know how that person feels. So, I came to a deeper appreciation for and understanding of the Incarnation. At some





point I realized that far from abandoning me, Jesus had taken my pain and the pain of those involved on Himself, that he shared our brokenness and anguish. Just knowing that helped. Now I can personally witness to and share with others in counseling situations that trust in God can heal us and make us whole again, not magically, but in community with those who love and accept us, and in community with our Lord through personal prayer and worship.

[My prayer/spiritual life] was strengthened, deepened and made more genuine and human, I think.

Life issues. Certainly more honesty about and acceptance of my personal vulnerability and my personal need for affection and satisfying personal relationships. Now in pre-marriage counseling I stress the need to nurture and take care of the relationship, not to take the intimate part of marriage for granted, to be intentional about it. That has been a very positive result.

The other issues that came to the fore were self-esteem and self-care. I learned that how I valued myself didn't have to be, or even should be, a mirror of another person's response. Yes, we need to be needed and need to be loved, but not in a dependent way. We shouldn't depend on another to make us feel good about ourselves. We have to, in the best sense, love ourselves before we can be truly giving in an interpersonal relationship. I had intensive analysis over a period of a year to help me work that through. That process is never-ending, but at least now I'm aware of the issues and am working on them.

Frame of reference. I did go to the Continuing Education program at Virginia Seminary in Alexandria. That was excellent. There I learned to do the reflection piece which enables you to tell your life's story, to put it together and identify your skills and gifts, etc. That was marvellous. Also, we did the Myers-Briggs in depth and that led to a greater depth of personal understanding.

What are you doing intentionally. In my marriage: continuing to develop deeper friendship with my wife, sharing things with her and doing things together. In professional life: taking advantage of continuing education opportunities, colleague support groups, spiritual friends, a men's Bible study group I meet with, etc.

Intervention. My bishop was extremely personally supportive of me, my family and of the other person involved. He was non-judgmental and very caring of us all. We know that he cared for us and was, in his way, hurting with us and for us as we struggled to work through that difficult time.

Because he knew that we were each getting counseling and seeking help, etc., there was no intervention as such on his part. I was always very honest with him and appreciated his support and caring for us. He was truly a pastoral bishop in every sense of the word. He trusted us and believed in us, each of us. And that made all the difference.

If mid-life is the beginning of a journey of integration, it is about incarnation—a putting together spirit and body, with all the associations both of those entities carry. A part of this man's journey has been the discovery of his emotional self, and the fright-



ening realization that in his emotions he is vulnerable. He is a man who had stock in being intellectually on top of things (in another part of the survey he said, "We never discussed personal, emotional vulnerability in seminary. So I thought I was prepared to handle anything. OR, I never thought that I could or would get emotionally involved.") but in this emotional entanglement he learned something priceless for himself, for his marriage, and for his ministry.

Another respondent has a more upbeat and cheerful attitude than many of us as he gives an account of some pretty dark times in his life.

There have been three times in my life which I call crisis times. At the age of 35 I experienced a vocational crisis, not of faith, but really one of job. It looked for a time that being a faithful layperson was a better way to carry out my baptismal ministry. Discussion with an understanding vestry sent me to Eden Seminary for a D.Min. That helped me sort out the vocational question.

At the age of 42, following the '79 General Convention I was wiped out, spiritually dead, and told the bishop so. He suggested a few weeks at a Jesuit Retreat Center in Pennsylvania. It turned out to be my religious experience and has kept me on a somewhat disciplined life of prayer and reflection ever since.

The last crisis came in 1989 when our daughter was killed in an automobile accident. My father had died just a year earlier. Her death was followed by the death of my younger brother from a heart attack and then just six months later my mother died. The three-year period from 1989 to 1991 was a spiritual struggle.

It was not that I lost my faith, but my theology, what I believed about God and how God worked, was really challenged. Again, an understanding vestry, parish, and staff, a sympathetic bishop, a great wife and family, were my strengths. Of course, [my wife] and I were really tested by [our daughter's] death, but that only reinforced how much in love we really were — and we have come out the stronger for it.

So, life has been good at times, and a bitch other times. As my youngest son put it after [my daughter's] death: 'sometimes life sucks, Dad.'

I know that there have been times when I flirted a bit too much, drank too much, ate too much, but as the guy said in *My Fair Lady*, 'with a little bit of luck' I either didn't get caught, or didn't get killed. Since I'm an INTJ, if I had been 'pure' I would have been more boring boring [*sic*] than I am already.

There have been no crisis management experiences in my life. I'm a successful humble, country parish priest trying to figure out what to do for the next ten to twelve years. I may go to the Northeast Career Center in Princeton for some guidance, or go the individual counselor route. I am talking that out with friends right now....

I rejoice for this man's good fortune in being among people who were steadfast







in their friendship for him. That has not been the case with many of us. Still, I suspect that he is the maker of some of his good luck. That is, he has been willing to accept friendship from others, and willing to open his heart to their good will. Beginning with the Vestry with whom he discussed his vocational doubts, he has taken others into his confidence and accepted their help in response. I admire that, especially in view of the risk it involves. He continues with that, discussing with friends what he should do with the years left to him. I admire his creativity in living his life.

Nevertheless, he has had a hard course in death and grief, with four deaths of loved ones within three years. This encounter with mortality and the loss of his youth are not described in their full emotional weight—it is in keeping with his temperament to describe it as he has done—but we can hear in his story the echoes of suffering.

Another respondent describes an encounter with the death of his young son. This happened when the respondent was in his early thirties. He doesn't count it as a 'dark wood' experience, but I include it here because there have been many good things resulting from the crisis.

The crisis for me and the family came about when our five-year-old son developed nephritis (kidney disease) — now twenty years ago. We were fortunate in having good medical help and both my wife and I felt we did everything we could possibly do from a medical point of view. The illness, in its extreme phase, did not last long — though it seemed interminable at the time. Andrew died in February 1971.

Many consequences came from that event, some of them still going on in our family. My wife and I had a strong relationship before and it was made immeasurably stronger through the difficulties of our son's illness and death. Our faith deepened. Our compassion and prayer life took on new dimensions. Our sense of God's healing power, of God's closeness increased. My preaching took on a more pastoral quality. I became involved in the development of a child-abuse prevention program and my community involvement centered in parenting issues for more than fifteen years. The raising of our other two children was changed. Issues surrounding Andrew's death are still part of our family life.

Most of all we were surrounded by a wonderful, loving church family, of both laity and clergy. We came out of the immediate time of shock and grief stronger as a family and in our faith.

...The crisis surrounding the death of our child was fairly early on in my ministry and in our married life. I was ministered to by my bishop, by other clergy, by the laity, by others in my family in remarkable ways, for which I am eternally grateful. It deepened my prayer and spiritual life and allowed new dimensions to



my pastoral ministry. It helped me focus on family issues, and on the value of life in all people.

The best frame of reference during all of that time—and since—has been the Scriptures and the Prayer Book. Other frames of reference that are mentioned like Myers-Briggs and 12-Step programs, have all been helpful to me, but none have become the cornerstone of my ministry—or my life—like the Bible and Prayer Book. Issues surrounding this time are still around—even twenty years later. They turn up in our other two children, in so many young people dying of AIDS, in other pastoral issues. I feel the pain still—thankfully. I rejoice in God's love—thankfully.

Finally, as I asked others to do, I make my own statement. Taking account of my temperament—acknowledged in Chapter 1—I will try not to be too maudlin.

In my story it is hard to know exactly where to begin. The event that occasioned my beginning to realize that I was bored with my parish seems to have been when some recent-comers went on with their journeys—which involved their moving away. I was glad they were getting on, and sad they were leaving; but I was left with the parish, and felt it was hopeless. I did the only thing I knew—I tried harder.

As is often said nowadays, men raised and acculturated in American society have a built-in difficulty with their feelings to begin with. We find it difficult to recognize our own feelings—especially uncomfortable feelings—and we tend to look for ways to ignore them or to 'fix' them. With some of us, intellectual analysis is used as a way of coping with feelings.

As it happened, although I was pretty conversant—glib, maybe—on the subject of mid-life crisis (and thought I was managing it fairly well) the first item on my unconscious agenda was that I must live in my feeling. My parish was not prospering as I had hoped it would as the fruit of my work over some sixteen years, and I had become bored and depressed. At the same time I was suffering the grief of our nest emptying out, and soon was added to that more grief at the death of my father.

(As Sullender suggests, both the emptying of the nest and the loss of elderly parents involve grief for the loss of youth.<sup>7</sup> It is not simply that the children, whose care and nurture have been a major concern of the family over nearly two decades, have now gone on to pursue their independent lives. It is not simply that the parent one has known as child and adult over many years has died. Both events usually happen at the time in one's life when the vigor of youth is on the wane, and conspire to signal the passing of one phase of life and entry upon a new phase of life. The attendant grief for the loss of youth compounds these other griefs.)

I was doing the best I knew how, to acknowledge my feelings and live in them. But more was required, it seems. So then I had an accident in my car—luckily a one-car accident—on ice, in which my car became a total wreck and I experienced the worst terror of my life. Within a year I had some more accidents, each one renewing that feeling of terror and telling me that I could no longer claim to be in control of my life as I had tried to be heretofore.

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<sup>7</sup>Sullender (1989), chapters 4 and 5.







My parish was becoming no longer able to support its own expectations: its financial condition and foreseeable future called for it to become a part-time ministry. I could not remain there in the changing situation, but even after searching for two years I could not find a new position. Clearly, I was not in control of this, either.

It felt the worse to me because I had not been able to save the parish from its decline, and was unable to feel OK about letting go of it. The situation deteriorated as some parishioners became more and more angry that no resolution appeared, and mounted a campaign to cut the budget from under me. At last there was nothing for me to do but resign and take a hastily arranged sabbatical leave. The canonical process was not invoked because there were no grounds, but I was too broken-hearted to want to stay any longer. Besides, I felt emotionally and spiritually beaten and exhausted. That these years of my work in that parish should come to this felt like total failure. Frankly, it took a good long time for me to come to terms with this situation and the pain it caused me, my wife, and some of our friends. Some friends betrayed us and some forsook us in this heartbreak, and some other friendships became much richer and deeper.

This situation developed over about two years. The pain was first mine, and then affected my wife and finally our friends. Losing the illusion of control, I felt fear and anger, and tried to regain control. Nothing I tried worked. The car accident seemed a fitting image of my life in that time, which was spinning out of control. Although I had walked away from the crash with only a few scratches, I had had a brush with death. Now it became clear that I had no certain future—another way of encountering mortality.

I should note that, as I became seriously depressed, the bishop sent my wife and me to Bermuda for a month's rest immediately after the parish Annual Meeting—we had not gotten away for a real vacation in years. In a small diocese where gossip among laity holds the field, he could not see that I got another job, but he tried to help the best he could.

I never found a spiritual director who was equipped to deal with me where I was. That in itself was discouraging, but I didn't really know what I needed either. It was not until I was in psychotherapy that I could really begin to feel my unresolved anger and let it heal.

One can easily conclude from this story that I was foolish to stay in this one parish—we were mismatched as well—as long as sixteen years. I say the same today. But among some of us there is still the ideal of long-term service. There were, as well, personal and family reasons for staying. My spiritual directors were not helpful in nosing out the issues and conflicts involved in all this.

In my professional life, I felt under attack. Although quite a few parishioners went out of their way to tell me how good I had been for them, the underground power structure was determined that I was the problem. I felt incompetent and disgraced without knowing why. I withdrew from others, because I became very unsure what effect I had on others and did not want to do any more harm.

My prayer went underground. I prayed the Psalms of anger at God. Otherwise,



I darkly knew that some better kind of prayer was going on in the inaccessible depths of my soul, and had to let that suffice. I felt betrayed by God—abandoned and ‘handed over’ to those who chose to destroy me.

These feelings of loss, betrayal and attack called up earlier memories, and I was forced to deal with my life in a new consciousness. My mother died suddenly when I was just short of 15; I knew this as a big scar in my soul for many years, but it wasn’t until I was 45 that I began to heal of that grief with its attendant guilt. Now—ten years later—I had to recall who she was to me before she died. I had to deal with the ways my family had been dysfunctional after she died, and to forgive both my father and myself for the ways that played out in our life together. His death was by contrast a wholesome experience full of our love for each other—I think he made it that way, or we cooperated to make it so. He lived in Denver, and I made three trips out there to see him in his last year—each time thinking it was the last time; so we had the chance to say the things to each other that often go unsaid. I also had to learn self-esteem apart from my ministry, and self-care.

As is obvious from this thesis, I have found Jungian psychology a resource for understanding myself and others. I have found the personality types helpful in appreciating both myself and others in our variety and similarity. In the depths of my anger, I could no longer relate closely to very much in scripture, and anyway distrusted the meanings I had treasured in it heretofore.

As of this writing I continue in a men’s therapy group, which helps me keep sharp on the things I have learned about myself. It is a laboratory for me to put into practice a new way of relating to others.

In these stories, we have heard in their own words how these clergy grappled with what life dealt them. We heard some common themes of mid-life, such as loss—loss of the meaning of life, especially the loss of the meaning invested in family (including child or spouse through death or divorce), of parents, of work. We have heard in these stories the consciousness of mortality. We catch resonances of the limited nature of time, and of mortality as reflected in the loss of youth, of health, of family, or of work, sometimes involving loss of status and of friends. We heard somewhat of the inner need or constraint to settle the past. Finally, we heard the need to recognize the limits of life and of ourselves and to be vulnerable to others.

None of these stories was couched in the special terms of Jungian thought. If any respondents were familiar with that frame of reference they do not venture to describe their experience that way. Yet, when we hear souls wrestling with their past—with their memories and those who reside there, the victimizers and the victims—we







are witnessing the shadow, the unconscious self, which either is coming to peaceful integration or is still somewhat uncomfortable. When we hear souls tell of their discomfort with the image of 'Priest,' of the renewal of their manner of being with others, of becoming more compassionate and gentle with others, we are hearing about the persona becoming more wholesome and integrated. Finally, in the Epilogue we shall hear from some souls who are on their way to attaining some recognizable wholeness and integration—symbolized in Jungian terms as the archetype of the Self.

## II. Reflections on Help for Clergy in Crisis

In the survey I asked, "Please give me the benefit of your recommendations for helping clergy deal with their crises (recognizing that crises are very individual)." We have seen that help is an issue in the stories of several clergy. Some received help from their bishops or from other clergy—at least as moral support and encouragement. The Church has a role to play in taking care of its ministers—caring for the care-givers—because they are sisters and brothers in Christ, as well as because the interests of effective ministry are thereby served. Those who may be wounded, frightened, discouraged or worn out, they need the kinds of help that are appropriate to their situation. What might that mean?

First, this respondent, who as a bishop is in a position to be of help to his clergy, submitted this in the survey.

I think we learn through pain and grief. The issue is not avoiding them but having the resources to deal with them. Clergy need help in being honest about their questions and their competitiveness. They need help in learning to be team members and not lone rangers.

[The question regarding help in crisis] is the biggest question of your entire project. The Alban Institute, Cornerstone Project, St Barnabas Center in Wisconsin, and any number of other programs are trying to provide a network of answers to the resources clergy need in their crises. We have recently entered into the Clergy Family Project of the National Council with the hope that we can identify the crises better and begin to build the supports necessary to help.

Clergy... need help identifying the crisis—naming it. Then they need resources—spiritual, therapeutic, financial, vocational—you name it. Most of all they need a community that recognizes crises and shares the hope of God's love.

This respondent has given thought and energy to the problems presented by clergy as



they learn through pain and grief. He shows compassion and wisdom regarding clergy in crisis.

The following respondent introduces two interesting metaphors of appropriate help, blankets and sandpaper! Both kinds of support are needed for our spiritual and mental health, and he suggests we generate support in our parishes as well as among our peers.

Clergy need help — peer support, a parish support group, places where they can get blankets and sandpaper. They need some wardens or other leaders who will give them sound advice and then be prepared to take it. They may need therapy in some instances. They need programs or courses that will focus on appropriate self care, how to watch for the warning signs of burn-out. They need variety in life and clarity of boundaries. They definitely need training in Conflict Management.

This respondent focuses on systemic resources and on clergy taking responsibility—both collegially for each other and individually for themselves.

Having experienced the work of bishops in dealing with crises both as a parish priest and a member of a diocesan [judicatory], I think that not enough resources are made available early enough in most cases. Bishops frequently ignore problems until all that's possible is a salvage operation, and then the parish is more likely to fare better than the priest.

I don't have any solutions to the problem, except to suggest that clergy might take more responsibility for caring for one another and offering help early on. Help offered by a peer might be more helpful than help offered by someone who will be asked for a recommendation the next time the priest seeks a new position.

In my present diocese, having seen crises end for the moment the active work of a couple of priests and threaten to do the same for a couple more, some of us are forming a clergy association largely to provide support during all sorts of crises.

Another respondent, while not addressing the question of recommendations, implies that autonomy is an issue to be addressed by clergy in caring for themselves.

Many of us, like this woman, have to learn about boundaries and about autonomy.

Through this experience, I have become more loving of myself, more forgiving, and generous. I have learned to recognize my needs, and how to respond to them by setting boundaries for myself. .... I've also come to see that the Church will never be the mother that I didn't have in my youth—in fact, she's more the mother that I did have: consuming, insensitive, all-encompassing. The best mother I'm ever going to have is me.

The following respondent also emphasizes our caring for ourselves.

Clergy have careers. In our Episcopal polity, we alone are responsible for our careers. We cannot wait for white doves to land. If we feel it's time to move, we should initiate a search. If we have ambitions, we should honor them. If we believe our present employer isn't treating us well, we should either teach them how to treat





us better or leave. When we reach the 50-plus age when it's often hard to move, we should be creative in how we play out our final career years. Twice I have followed a priest who stayed too long, got trapped, got sick and became ineffective. When this happens, the incumbent suffers, the parish suffers, and the successor suffers.

From these responses and my experience, I will draw some conclusions. They are set out in Chapter 4.



### **Chapter 3.**

#### **Formation for Ministry**

Since I have undertaken this study from the point of view of the mid-life transition (or crisis), I offer the opinion at the outset that the very best formation will not necessarily avoid the mid-life transition. The transition will come in its own time, no matter what. Nor will the very best formation avoid the transition coming on as full-blown crisis. ‘You can run but you can’t hide’ from the existential anxiety and desolation that is often the worst interior pain of the mid-life crisis. Other factors—external and internal—will have much to do with whether a person feels the mid-life transition as a crisis or not.

I do contend, however, that solid and careful formation will help mitigate some painful and professionally damaging aspects of the mid-life crisis. If the recently-ordained are taken seriously from the beginning, if they are helped to fill in the possible gaps in their regimen of self-care (including their care of their families), and if their continuing self-care in spiritual direction is heartily encouraged, then the mid-life transition will not have to include learning—so late!—to pay attention to their own needs. Need it be said that ministry from the early years on will be more effective as well?

#### **I. Job Placement: First Three-to-Five Years After Ordination**

Some of us look back over three decades to recall our beginnings in ordained ministry. The Church—as well as our nation—was in a different historical juncture thirty years ago than now. The Church coming out of the booming fifties felt itself stronger, seemed to know what it was about, seemed to have answers to questions. As the upheavals of the sixties were still in the future—the March on Washington in August of 1963 would really start the public struggle for civil rights—the Church thought itself stable and thought it knew its mission. The formation of new clergy for career ministry did not seem to need much attention, the bishops and senior clergy knew what to do and how to do it. At least, that seems to have been the attitude of most bishops. One respondent wrote:





“During my time in Seminary there was almost NO contact between me and the Diocese of Los Angeles or the Bishop. We were left pretty much to our lonely selves....

“There was no formal continuing education program for the newly ordained as I remember it (thinking back almost 30 years), but the pattern was that we all did Curacies and were trained by older, more experienced Priests. I returned to the Parish which I had long attended before Seminary (served on the Vestry, was Treasurer, ...), so it was an easy time for me.

“In those days Curacies were 3 years, and then you were expected to move on. When my time came in 1965, I had decided I wished to become a worker Priest — work part-time to support myself and volunteer my time to the Church as my schedule permitted. I pursued this pretty much on my own as I remember.”

By deciding to be a worker-priest, this respondent launched himself in a somewhat unconventional direction for those days. But the other parts of his story were not unusual: not much attention from the diocese during seminary, a curacy, and then you're on your own.

For many years the most usual practice has been to place the recently ordained in one of two typical situations: 1) as curate in a parish large enough to be able to pay an assistant, or 2) as vicar in charge of one to three tiny rural congregations. These kinds of placement came in for very mixed reviews in the survey. Practically everybody would agree with this respondent:

“Some kind of apprenticeship (mentoring) is essential in the first years. This can be formalized or informal but new clergy need to be able to talk to other clergy honestly and openly.”

None of us would disagree that some kind of mentoring relationship is *essential* in formation for ministry. The qualification “honestly and openly” may reflect a recognition that the arrangement has often lacked something in the past, that there have been many curacies in which there was anything but honesty and openness. We all know this, and have often heard young clergy tell horror stories about their experience.

Sometimes the arrangement worked well, and another respondent writes that his experience leads him to the same conclusion:

“I think that all clergy should serve some form of curacy in order to learn the trade and test their theories without having to live with them for too long. My best teachers were my first boss, and my first vestry. Laity have much to teach us if we only give them a chance.”

Others of us have had good experiences as curates, as these respondents did:



“Formation of Newly Ordained — I received basically nothing in this regard in my first diocese (and home diocese since childhood). Fortunately, I worked with an exceptionally sensitive and supportive priest as his assistant, and found him an important element of my formation.”

“I was blessed to have been under the tutelage of ——. His spiritual and personal care was loving, affirming, and wise, and his giftedness as a teacher was a wonderful model for my own ministry. He was the first to recognize some of my interior struggles and suggested that I seek help in naming some of the painful aspects of my life history. With the help of a therapist, I was able to overcome some of the day-to-day anxieties that made life so difficult at times.....”

This latter respondent’s rector is particularly commendable for his sensitivity and wisdom, for the respondent is a woman, and it was in the early days of ordaining women. In those years—even more than now—ordained women were pioneers, and had to face many stresses as they made their way into this formerly all-male ministry.

Another woman, already quoted at length in Chapter 2, was not so lucky:

“I was hired as a lay DRE.... The half-time position was ‘used up’ by education tasks and after ordination, the diaconal, and then priestly, tasks of pastoral and liturgical duties were simply tacked on with no consideration given to the extra time needed and no recognition to the fact that these were, indeed, right and proper things for me to be doing. The parish acknowledged my change in status and in ‘being’ but the rector didn’t and the budget didn’t. ....”

It is not uncommon among women clergy to feel they are specially subject to treatment that is demeaning, and I cannot say that is not true. Still, it is also possible that this rector (and many other rectors) would have treated a male curate—especially a young one—the same way. It is entirely possible that he was treated in similar fashion as a young curate. It is also possible that he felt beaten down in the same ways by the parish system—financially and in workload (or duties assumed)—and was simply initiating his curate into this culture. This might even have been unconscious or unexamined. He may have needed the same kind of care and affirmation that the curate felt she was not getting. The respondent writes out of her subjectivity, and we do not know what efforts she made to express her needs or to renegotiate the mutual expectations of her position.

Another respondent wrote appreciatively of his curacy:

“The most important part of my formation after ETS was the time I spent with a very experienced priest (now a bishop). During the three years that I worked in a team ministry with him, I learned a great deal about every aspect of parish life.”

Clergy who have been so blessed in their early years of ministry have much to be





thankful for. These, at least, carry blessings from their first years of ordained ministry. It is worth noting that, in the survey, all those who speak well of their early years were curates: none was alone in a tiny mission.

A respondent who did begin his ministry all alone in the rural deep South remembers it as a severe trial—nearly the end of him:

“My first year was awful - 1962. I was a deacon, 30 miles from the nearest Episcopal priest, in a very small mission, at the beginning of the civil rights movement. I almost left the ministry, but hung on. Then I was moved to ———, where I did a two-year curacy under a great teacher and mentor.... He saved my ministry in the immediate sense, but also gave me tools and insights that have affected my practice of ministry over the years. Also, on moving to the diocese of Washington, I had the opportunity to be in a peer learning and support group led by Jack Anderson and Jim Fenhagen.”

Another respondent also had a shaky beginning, all by himself:

“To begin with, I was one of those who were literally thrown to the wolves, with a small mission in Montana, later they added another which was 75 miles away. The bishop resigned shortly after I was made a Deacon, and left the state after I was made a priest six months later. I felt the need for Spiritual direction, having gone to a seminary which became preoccupied with what was going on in the riots in Philadelphia.”

As life in the turbulent sixties unfolded, the seminaries and the Church were caught up in a struggle to discern their mission and ministry. This respondent felt short-changed, and his first position was in every way far from the life of his seminary. He was geographically distant from his seminary and from other Episcopal clergy, he was set down in a culture far different from the big Eastern city, and had no community life like that of the seminary in which to share his struggle.

In the survey I asked for recommendations for the formation of newly-ordained clergy. We have seen that several respondents favor a mentoring relationship—even see it as essential—in the early years of ordained ministry. Another proposes something on the model of medical training:

“After conscientious seminary training, we enter quite abruptly the world of the church. It would probably be too much to expect the training of specialized physicians, but some movement toward the internship and residency models would be helpful.”

Another respondent is brief and to the point: “My recommendation for the formation of newly ordained clergy would be a) close mentor supervision with an experienced and



able priest. b) peer learning and support group.” I would only add that there needs to be peer support or supervision for the mentors as well: we need to eradicate the lone-ranger mentality at all levels.

The arrangement by which a newly ordained person is put under the care and tutelage of an experienced priest is a toss of the dice. In the first place, there is the simple fact that the parish is large enough to pay for a curate. In recent years, parishes and their characteristics have been studied by Arlin Rothauge and others; what was clear to most of us long ago is now catalogued in terms of ‘Pastoral,’ ‘Program’ and ‘Corporation’ parishes. The rector of a parish large enough to afford a curate will almost without exception be strong in administration. Is it too harsh to say that such a priest usually will have some difficulty relating closely with people? To the extent that this is true, the very personal qualities and talents that make the rector desirable as rector of a large parish may make her/him less effective as a mentor. Obviously there are exceptions—as noted in the above testimonials—but my experience and observation lead me to suggest that it is not uncommon. In any case—whether my undocumented hunch is true or not—we need to pay close and careful attention to what educational experience the curate will have in relationship with the senior priest—and at the kind of learning about how to be a pastor a curate will receive in such a situation.

A priest of some wisdom, and experience in both parishes and diocesan offices, reflects:

“It has been my observation ... that some of the priests who are most suited to the role of mentor are serving parishes which cannot afford a curate, and that the rectors of parishes which have curates are often terrible mentors. While we cannot stop large parishes from hiring curates and making them suffer under such rectors, I believe that we ought to be able to find the resources to place the newly ordained under the supervision of priests who have demonstrated an ability to help in formation. The short term cost would be small by comparison with the long term cost to the Church of our present system.”

This needs to be taken seriously. Obviously, large parishes are going to hire new clergy as curates, and—again—a principal reason for this is financial. To state it flatly, new clergy are cheaper. (I write from the depressed Northeast, and it is hard to imagine a church that is not strapped by tight budgets and financial worries.) Very well,





facts are facts, and money is surely one of them. The question is: can we imagine a structure for the curacy of a newly-ordained cleric in which the diocese—perhaps through its able priests—takes an active role in formation? The astute balancing of short-term and long-term costs—in both money and effective ministry—is worth our best efforts.

As for putting new clergy in charge of small congregations, there is a recommendation against that:

“I’d recommend that new clergy not be put in charge of congregations, but be guided into apprenticeships with healthy and capable rectors. I recommend that those apprenticeships be lengthy — five years or so — and that they be seen as management training, not acculturation into the Church. For one thing, the Church is changing too fast for today’s acculturation to be relevant tomorrow. The world is changing fast, too. The aim of the apprenticeship should be learning how to function effectively in a complex and changing environment.”

The same respondent then goes on to expound a view that might be prophetic: “The future of the Episcopal Church, in my opinion, lies in large congregations. The day is over when the Episcopal Church could comfortably be a denomination of small parishes. Financial viability is one reason. Another is the need for substantial program, both because people demand it and because we need to compete for the people whose loyalty we used to take for granted. Small survival-oriented parishes engaged in endless financial worries simply won’t make it. New clergy should learn how large congregations work. That calls for some new and unique skills, more akin to corporate managers than to country parsons. Many clergy resist the corporate metaphor, but if they want to have lively careers and effective ministries, they had better overcome that resistance.”

We can all see that the number of parishes in the Episcopal Church is shrinking, as is the number of members. We can all see that many small parishes are becoming financially unable to maintain their viability and are taking the option for part-time ministry. At the same time, it is said that the generation of the ’60’s—to the extent that they will come back to church at all—will join the larger churches, because these are able to support the programs that will be desired. It is a consumer spirit, and it tilts the future toward the larger congregations, as our respondent predicts.<sup>1</sup> If that is so, it will eventually mean more large parishes in which our new clergy can be mentored and

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<sup>1</sup>Unfolding history, of course, may prove this prediction false, like many others before it.



formed. It also will mean a loss of intimacy such as can only be found in small congregations, and yet more distance set between us and the country parson image that many still harbor. There are some needs that a corporation church cannot fill.

An alternative to the corporation church, in urban as well as rural areas, is the linked multi-parish or 'deanery parish,' with a team of clergy for its ministry.<sup>2</sup> This is already an established structure in some areas—though, to my knowledge, only in rural (or small town) situations. Obviously, not all clergy will fit well into this structure; but for those who do—and with the right team members—the advantages of both the small congregations and the team of colleagues for peer support highly commend themselves.

The small parishes left over from this projected future—especially in rural areas where consolidation is much more difficult if not simply impossible—must have some provision for sacramental and pastoral ministry. One respondent lamented the passing of the small church: "I love and know the small church. Does any one care or really invest in the small church anymore? Hell. I can't find em! No more Roanridge etc...." (This respondent said, "My stuff is not anonymous—use it any way you wish," but for the sake of consistency and fairness to all, I am not using anyone's name but mine.) The point is, the small church should not be used as the testing place for new clergy. It is not fair to the small church, nor is it fair to most new clergy. Bp Wesley Frensdorff's adaptations of the indigenous ministry idea may provide a more creative model for these rural situations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Two decades ago Urban Holmes imagined *The Future Shape of Ministry* (1971). The idea of small communities under a larger umbrella was proposed in that book, much more radically than here. He contended—rightly, I think—that "every Christian needs the experience of the intimate community, as well as the great church" (p. 234). He said that large parishes can hardly fulfill the need for intimacy, and don't do well with grand scale liturgy or social action either. See his discussion in Chapter 12 of *Future Shape*. The sociological and structural questions are not within the scope of this thesis, and my viewpoint is simply that of a parish priest who has worked within the present system and witnessed its dysfunctionality.

<sup>3</sup>I have heard both Bp Frensdorff and his administrative deacon, Phina Borgessen, speak at conferences on "Total Ministry." Unfortunately, a search of periodical indices turns up





Whatever structure is set in place for the beginning ministry of the newly ordained, somebody will criticize it. These respondents, however, reflect their experience and their observations of the Church over years of ministry. They should not be ignored.

Nor, I think, do these stories and opinions say much that bishops and clergy do not already know. The question is of inertia: are we not creative enough to reenvision the formation process and do it better?

## **II. Formation for Life-Care.**

### **A. Stewardship of Time, Stewardship of Life.**

From the responses to my survey I conclude that those who responded generally do not look back upon their formation experience with very high regard. To be more precise, many of us have little to thank our bishops and diocesan structures for. Some of us remember our first years of parish ministry in terms of survival: our initiation into and formation in professional ministry seemed a pretty elaborate form of fraternity hazing, haphazard or worse under a rector who was not suitable as mentor to us.

One issue checked off in the survey as lacking in formation programs is time management/life management. We wish we had received (better) guidance about this. I remember my bishop telling us ordinands, before we were made deacons, "I always take a day off, and I think you should too." That was fine as far as it went, but it was not enough. At least for people like me, much more was necessary, because we are too easily taken into the systemic addictions of church life. (Again, I recognize that my temperament is more susceptible to this than those of many others: I am among those who have "difficulty placing limits on the amount of time and energy" we are willing to devote to our work.<sup>4</sup> But at least I speak for those of us with this temper, and possibly for some others.) Put us to work for a workaholic rector and we become infected by the same addiction. We set about serving God by serving all the needs of all the pa-

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nothing by or about either of them on this subject, or about the Nevada plan for parish structure or mission strategy, in the past twenty years.

<sup>4</sup>Keirse and Bates (1978), p. 65.



rishioners. We become neglectful of our own well-being and of our marriage and family, in the name of our calling—in the name of serving God! (That's a heavy burden for a spouse to bear.)

At least for some clergy, my bishop's advice needs to be repeated often in the first three-to-five years after ordination. It needs to be repeated often enough that it soaks in, and it needs to be repeated in a peer group or by a spiritual director until each individual learns to confront those who would contradict it—whether the rector or parishioners or oneself. It is probably clear, but I will state it plainly: I wish I had this good advice insistently drummed in. Or—just possibly—I wish I had been able to hear it; that issue will be taken up in (C) below.

Furthermore, the advice to take a day off needs to be augmented by some further suggestions, such as: 1) don't be suckered by the telephone. If you can leave town on your day off and do something fun for yourself, do it. But you shouldn't be compelled to leave town to have some time off: if you stay home and answer the telephone, be clear what kind of messages you want to give if someone calls you on business. 2) If you don't have a hobby, go and buy one. At least on your day off, you need to spend time doing something that satisfies you, some activity that will refresh and recreate you. You absolutely must honor your gifts and talents—most especially those that are not actively in use in your ministry. If your spouse can share your hobby with you, so much the better; if it is something for you alone, allot some time for it and some to spend with your spouse doing something else.

I couldn't say it better than this respondent does:

"We need to learn how to care for ourselves. We need to lead whole lives, not church lives. That means seeking non-church friends, non-church activities, plenty of leisure time and a healthy family. My role as parish priest is a job, not a life. My life as a Christian person, parent, husband and citizen is a life."

In my case, I am a trained instrumental musician, but for twenty-two years of my ministry there was no orchestra that I could play in. I regretted that situation, but did not become angry enough to do something about it—starting an orchestra, or moving to a different locale. In the spirit of self-sacrifice I accepted the lack of an outlet for my talent, not realizing what the long-term toll on me would be. Since returning to





Cambridge, a part of caring for myself has been my joining an orchestra; it meets once a week, puts me in touch with people who like my playing but for whom the church and ministry do not matter—at least while we practice. For me, to honor my musical talent is to honor the God who made me and included it in my make-up. To exercise this talent is creative and recreative.

Even off-time and pursuing a hobby is not enough for clergy who are susceptible to workaholism, however. We need also to be told to organize our weekly schedule so that on, say, at least four days out of seven, we include in our waking hours something that is likely to be enjoyable and fulfilling, fun. It is all too easy for us to work away compulsively at job-related tasks and neglect ourselves and our families. There are only a few hours in the day when we are welcome in parishioners' homes for non-crisis pastoral calls. It can happen that we take up those hours with the effort to find our parishioners at home and visit them (they tell us they want us to visit them, though we may sometimes wonder if they really mean it). It also can happen that those visits, or the effort to make them, are not much fun: they can be draining, they can be depressing, they can be especially hard work when we visit the laggards and backsliders.

What do we do with the other hours of the day? We read the mail—which as often as not is trying to hustle us to do something we really don't want to do. We work on next Sunday's sermon—we study the texts, we look up quotations and such, we think about it, we write things down. (Please pardon my generalizing here: some clergy are much better preachers than I am, and with a lot less effort—or so it seems to me. As with most things, I work too hard at it and worry it to death.) Most church meetings are in the evening, or on Saturdays, so it happens that many of our evenings are taken up that way. And there are a multitude of other details of running a parish that we can take up our time doing. The point is, where is there room in this kind of day for something that's fun, recreating, fulfilling for me? The spirit of my bishop's advice to take a day off every week needs to be carried over through the week, lest I be compulsive for six days and try to be non-compulsive on the seventh—because that will eventually court



disaster. Each of us has a different idea of what is fun; we need to know what is fun for us and honor it in some way. Even on work-days!

## B. The Question of Peer Relations

An issue several respondents pointed to, and is clearly a problem, is isolation. The clergy in many areas and in many dioceses regard one another from a distance. We are in competition for parishioners, we are in competition for the best work and the going-est parish, we are in competition for competence. (Our parishioners too often see it this way too: when a neighboring parish was in trouble, my senior warden asked in a Vestry meeting if there was any way we could get hold of their mailing list!) We regard professional lives and personal lives as matters of personal responsibility.

If a neighboring priest becomes addicted to alcohol or drugs, we may never know until it is already public knowledge. If a neighboring priest is in marital trouble, we may never know until the divorce is at least in process. If we are the one in trouble, in whom shall we confide? Is there another priest who really knows us, for whom our story would have a context in that knowledge, and who would have the compassion and wisdom to listen and be supportive in appropriate ways? Some of us have been blessed in this way, but many have not. One respondent put it rather harshly:

### “Learning the Hard Way

What level of confidentiality to expect of peers—the level at which rumor, innuendo, and (to put it nicely) half-truths abound among clergy is incredibly high to my mind. I ‘should have known,’ but ended up learning via small bumpy routes (not the ‘major crisis,’ however).”

I hope no bishop or mentor would feel it necessary to caution a newly ordained person, as a rule, not to trust other clergy. But it surely should be a concern of bishops to foster a spirit among the clergy that would undercut this tendency to gossip. And on occasion to confront it very pointedly.

Clergy must learn to regard themselves as members of a community of colleagues. As dioceses and in smaller groups such as deaneries, or—where geographically possible—in informal groups of friends, we need to work at building intentional communities of colleagues for support of our ministry. One respondent writes that

“clergy have to be prepared to take care of one another and to seek help from one





another. I no longer trust the institution, or its leaders, to look out for my interests. I need to find colleagues with whom I can share the task of looking out for one another."

The intentional building of peer support will come up again in (D), below.

### C. Spiritual Companionship

All this points to the need for spiritual companionship. Only very recently have very many clergy recognized spiritual companionship as a possibility, and even as a good thing.

Not enough people have been trained in the arts of spiritual companionship. Only a few clergy are competent at it. There is no compelling reason laity cannot exercise this ministry, even with clergy. Sometimes, Roman Catholic religious sisters are very helpful in this ministry to Episcopal clergy. (Episcopalian religious sisters also may exercise this ministry to clergy, but I have not heard of it.) To be sure, the demands of spiritual companionship are such that the best companions for some clergy may be professional counselors or psychotherapists.

One survey respondent recommends for formation, "Get the person with a mentor who can spiritually direct the new ministry. Make available a Christian therapist for the clergy and family. By Christian I mean a believer, who knows something about congregation life." I do not necessarily agree that the therapist must be a believer, since the problem areas are simply human; still, an appreciation for the dynamics of social behavior would surely be essential. (A therapist who did me much good is a former Dominican nun. That is a fact of her past, however, and is not the first or most important factor in her very effective work. Most important is that she is highly intuitive and willing to take risks on her hunches.)

One survey respondent recommends, for clergy in crisis:

"Get a therapist (I tried two during this period and neither helped). Get in a Spiritual Direction relationship. Get the family in therapy. Don't depend on a bishop or other clergy. Recognize a bad match with a parish and get out quickly."

Some of this is surely appropriate as preventive care well ahead of crisis. Taking life as a whole, rather than drawing a line between personal and professional life, I contend there is not a clear and necessary line between therapy and spiritual direction, and I



agree that the “right” therapist or companion may not be easy to find. Recognizing “a bad match with a parish” is not easy for some of us (I do not know of any diagnostic tools for this particular situation), but the right spiritual companion should regard this issue as appropriate matter for discussion, and can be invaluable as bringing a different perspective. The family may or may not need therapy except in a crisis (how shall we define need?). And it is often not wise to depend on the bishop or other clergy to see what we need or to confront us on our care of ourselves and our families.

Much of what is supposed to be ‘spiritual direction’ focuses much too narrowly on prayer and ‘spiritual’ life. The precise definition of ‘spiritual life’ may be narrow or broad, but people who offer the ministry of spiritual companionship—probably some clergy do this ministry more than anybody else—are generally not trained and equipped in the fine art of identifying the issues of growth and health in the lives of others and pursuing them insistently. (All professional psychotherapists are not equal in this regard, either.) To most of us clergy, being ‘pastoral’ in our work generally means the opposite of confrontation. We need more and better-trained spiritual directors.<sup>5</sup>

One survey respondent offers this:

“Allowing oneself to become dependent on the institution is folly. What clergy need is savvy, not illusions. Savvy requires experience, learning to understand systems, learning about people, and learning about oneself, especially how one uses and responds to power.”

One way to get this savvy, of course, is by constant self-reflection. Still, I contend that these issues—and others—are too hard to leave to that chance. As someone said, “Whoever it was that discovered water, you can be sure it was not a fish.” The issues that affect us so very closely, and are indeed part of our own personalities (such as our uses of and responses to power), are too difficult to apprehend and deal with by our

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<sup>5</sup>Books and articles on spiritual direction proliferate. The training I am thinking of does not come from reading, but from the kind of disciplined supervision that a psychotherapist is likely to get in training. The issues are interpersonal, and will be learned through coaching rather than from reading. As important as knowledge of the spiritual life is—with the various problems, exigencies and pitfalls—spiritual companionship is interpersonal, and there is skill involved in working issues through with persons. The training regimen of the Shalem Institute in Washington may come closest to what I mean here.





lonely selves. Even if CPE provided great insight into ourselves, we need some continuing process of reflection in relationship. Without questioning the power of prayer, and the power of God to lead us through prayer, it is much more efficient to find these things in relationship with a companion who is trained in this type of discipline. Need we say that God created us for relationship, and uses such relationships for our good?

Studzinski, with Levinson, recommends what both call the mentor relationship.

They state clearly that the mentor's task is both sensitive and tough:

A person's relationship with a mentor can itself be the scene of struggle and hardship because it can call forth old patterns of relating to parents and reawaken childhood expectations and disappointments. Levinson, describing the male perspective, sees this in terms of a man struggling with the little boy still present within himself: 'The little boy desperately wants the mentor to be a good father in the most childish sense—a father who will make him special, will endow him with magical powers and will not require him to compete or prove himself in relation to would-be rivals. It is also the little boy who anxiously makes the mentor into a bad father—a depriving, dictatorial authority who has no real love and merely uses one for his own needs. The relationship is made untenable by the yearning for the good father, the anxiety over the bad father, and the projection of both of these internal figures onto the mentor, who is then caught in the bind.' However, this difficulty can be worked through with the assistance of a mentor who is attuned to what is happening. Thus, to be a good mentor Levinson holds that a person must have successfully done the work of his or her own midlife transition.<sup>6</sup>

It must not be supposed that only 'sick' people would get all tangled up about their relationships in this way. Those who are well-adjusted adults may have settled these issues—but they never go away. Below the surface of each of us, these dynamics lie dormant, perhaps, but under enough stress they can erupt and distress even well-balanced people. The point is, spiritual direction/companionship can be difficult and can require arts and skills that most practicing spiritual directors have not acquired. It is worth emphasizing that the good spiritual director should have successfully done the work of his or her own midlife transition.

To take one issue for example, I took notice in Chapter 1 of the danger of workaholism. Workaholism, far from being the benign and even laudable quirk that our society takes it to be, is a death-dealing addiction. If we take that seriously, we will

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<sup>6</sup>Studzinski (1985), p. 49. Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, p. 147.



not suppose it is all right for clergy to be or become workaholics. Workaholism is detrimental to good ministry and to healthy ministers and ministers' families.

It is not a simple matter, however, to identify this disease and intervene before it reaches crisis proportions. In the first place, as Schaef and Fassel point out, "work is a very tricky addiction, ... because when workaholics are most 'into' their disease, they feel most alive, even though it may be killing them."<sup>7</sup> What is the problem with a workaholic's relation to work and to life?

For people who are not work-addicted, there are pauses between projects, times when one savors success and rests and spends time with loved ones. For the workaholic, the prospect of these pauses is terrifying, for they are not experienced as times of release and quiet. They are times of being out of touch with the 'fix' of the addictive substance and functioning in an arena that cannot be controlled by the work process.<sup>8</sup>

That is what signals addiction to work. But how do we help an addict admit the problem? After all, a very common defense mechanism routinely employed by addicts of all kinds is denial. Schaef and Fassel say this about denial: "If something does not exist, it simply does not have to be considered. ... The alcoholic says, 'I am not an alcoholic. I may have a small drinking problem, and I may overdo it a bit on weekends or under stress, but I do not have a severe problem.'"<sup>9</sup> Denial allows us to avoid coming to terms with what is happening to our lives and health. When we will not let ourselves or others confront us about our behavior regarding work we perpetuate our descent into this hell.

I wish to emphasize in this context that spiritual direction/companionship is not a luxury or a bit of professional fluff that really is not worth worrying about. What is at stake is both the health of those precious souls who happen to be the church's ordained ministers and the quality of ministry in the church. To be frank, the church as an institutional system (with a few exceptions) does not help us see clearly our own health issues. Schaef and Fassel are blunt about institutional religion:

To the extent that religious systems are caught in the same processes as the addict, they themselves support our remaining in the addictive system. Indeed, whenever

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<sup>7</sup>Schaef and Fassel (1988), p. 131.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 62.





we confuse religion with spirituality, we are opting for the structure, control, and rules of an addictive system. This reliance on religion may remove us from the inner search only we can do from the depths of our own being.<sup>10</sup>

This confusion is exactly what characterizes most parishes. For most of our parishioners church activities fill needs both religious and social. 'Attending' church fills the religious need, and need not include a search for honest spirituality. The symbols and trappings are sufficient to comfort them that they are being religious. Some of us clergy work hard to bring spiritual reality into this religiosity, but it is uphill all the way. The social activities of the church are legitimate enough, and often serve the further purpose of raising money to keep the church running. We know the priorities are usually wrong, but we also know the parish needs the money. So we spend time and energy on projects that are peripheral, at best, to what we thought we were being ordained for.

Schaef and Fassel point out why clergy, like nurses and others, become worn out:

Is it any wonder people in the helping professions are often exhausted and depressed? They join an organization to do one thing and spend most of their time doing another. As we see, frequently the thing they end up doing is totally incongruent with the reasons they became helpers in the first place.<sup>11</sup>

Most assuredly, clergy are subject to this 'bait and switch' tactic as we go into parish ministry.

How can we work on these issues in a constructive way, as a normal part of our self-care? I am contending that spiritual direction/companionship is a necessary part of our life as ministers, and that this needs to have the capacity to be tough when the situation calls for being tough. The alternative is to scrap the whole project of ministry as a bad idea.

#### D. Spiritual Companionship in a Peer Group

Spiritual companionship need not always be in a one-on-one setting. Several survey respondents cited and recommended peer groups as supportive and helpful. For example,

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<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 123.



“Another important element — something which I didn't have when I was newly ordained — would be some form of regular meeting of clerics during the first year or so after ordination. In larger dioceses, this can be a fairly elaborate program and combined with a program for mentors. But even in smaller dioceses, where there might be only a couple of recent ordinands, a reflection group with a senior priest. (I met for about a year with two recent ordinands when I was a member of a diocesan staff and would like to believe that it was a valuable experience for both of them.)”

“What needs to happen during the learning years? As hard as some lessons are, there's no better way to learn them than by experience. Clergy need to be tough. Not so callous that we cannot sense and respond to people's needs, but tough enough to handle stress, rejection and conflict. Toughness isn't a skill, as much as it is an attribute that arises out of taking risks, being taken seriously and shown the learnings of our particular experience. I hesitate to use the word 'mentor,' because that often implies one who makes the path easier. In fact, the hard road is where the best lessons abound. I personally have benefitted most from colleagues who had enough experience to help me recognize what I was experiencing but avoided treating me as a child. Finding such colleagues is a critical act of self-preservation that probably is born of desperation, rather than of pre-planning.”

We need, this respondent says, to take risks and then learn from the experience. We need to be taken seriously. We need collegial support. I absolutely agree, and contend that this needs to be provided for as a normal part of our lives. A peer group that stays together over a considerable time—long enough to establish and operate from mutual trust—is the best structure for this, and fosters ministry to each other.

Another respondent writes:

“I think we learn through pain and grief. The issue is not avoiding them but having the resources to deal with them. Clergy need help in being honest about their questions and their competitiveness. They need help in learning to be team members and not lone rangers.”

I suggest that peer groups can help us be (or become) honest—providing that being honest is an agreed agenda of the group and it is willing to work at it. Agreeing to be and become honest in a peer group is no small accomplishment, and staying with it is even bigger. The possibility of betrayal is always there, perhaps especially by a member who drops out. For those willing to be challenged by this trust and by the honesty of their peers, and to challenge their peers in turn, the benefits are very great.

“I think the greatest issue I have had to deal with in the formation of my ministry is one of honesty — being honest with myself. I am not sure this can be taught to





newly ordained and young clergy — though it may be applicable to clergy ordained in their 30's or 40's. Age/experience is a better teacher than youth."

This respondent mentioned group learning only in reference to a conference or workshop. But the need for honesty with oneself is intimately involved in honesty with others, and so I argue that a peer group that works at mutual honesty and trust would help very much.

Another respondent testifies to the value of group therapy—a variation on the theme of group self-care:

"I've been enriched by group therapy—something I once swore that I'd never do, 'I can't trust those people'—and I regularly attend Al-Anon. Both have been very important adjuncts to the private therapy that I've received."

This group therapy—whether it is 'religious' or not—amounts to spiritual direction and companionship of the sort that clergy need regularly. The camaraderie that develops in a group of peers that meets regularly over an extended period can be very valuable. This respondent is one of several to mention receiving help from one or another of the 12-Step programs—whether the person is actually addicted or not.

To be most effective and efficient, combining the peer group with the leadership of a trained director/therapist would capitalize on the strengths of both kinds of group process. And, by the way, such groups under supervision would tend to overcome the isolation and mistrust that afflicts clergy groups. I have participated in peer groups and know they can be valuable; but there usually comes a time when such a group runs out of gas. Supervision by a trained director/therapist can be helpful in discovering new material to work on.

It will be obvious to us all that supervising or leading such a peer group is hard work. Work must be supported by compensation, whether the leader is a fellow priest or a trained professional therapist (sometimes one can find both in one person). Leaders must be chosen carefully, and work under supervision. They must be compensated, both because time and energy are required and because the work should be recognized as important. In a financially strapped condition such as we find ourselves in now, some creative thought needs to be applied to providing this necessity.

To begin with, such a group might well form to study the issues of addiction.



We recognize that alcoholism is a national cultural problem, so the pastoral value of delving into this topic should be immediately apparent. As the issues are brought out, the personal implications for participants can be made part of the discussion. One respondent wrote about his early formation:

“A peer group in [a particular diocese] would rank as another important experience for me, assisting in developing better skills in listening, reflecting and diagnosing pastoral situations. This group also afforded me the opportunity to discuss issues of sexuality openly with peers, and the effect alcohol had on my personal and family life.”

There is no limit to the good such a peer group structure can do for clergy, on many fronts.

#### E. Conflict Management

Another topic for discussion that received many recommendations in the survey responses is Conflict Management. It is frequently mentioned as something we wish somebody had helped us with early on, as this priest writes:

“How to handle conflicts has been one of the things which I have had to learn along the way. I’m not sure that anyone could have given me much help before I was on my own in a parish, but I would have appreciated some attempts to prepare me for the kinds of conflicts which often arise in parishes.”

“Teach parish development the way the Interim Network does, teach conflict resolution. Have the clergy read the Bible, participate in Bible study, pray constantly and have a Spiritual Director.”

“I wish I had the benefit of a course in Conflict Management in Seminary. I have since done so at the doctoral level with great results. I did not understand my own conflict management style, that other styles existed which could be used in different situations. I was in such pain with my relationship with the rector, I only knew avoidance. It was inappropriate, I had nowhere to go, I waited too long to leave and just dropped out to return to my former profession and seek healing.”

We see that memories of our early years of ordained ministry include conflict both with rectors and with parishioners or parish systems. When conflict arises, emotional expectations on all sides are involved and must be expressed and resolved. We read, above, the account of a woman who began as a lay DRE, who found herself in conflict with her rector. We do not know what kinds of negotiations went on between





them, or between either party and the Vestry or parishioners. The conflict might have played out in many different ways, but above all, there was a clear and present demand for discussing mutual recognition of needs, and resolution of the conflict.

James and Evelyn Whitehead have written extensively about leadership in the churches, what it has been and what it must become. They see that the laity demand the clergy be heroic, or god-like—wiser, holier, more generous than the laity—and that such an image of leadership is blind to the priest's emotional needs. As they see it, power, authority and leadership must be shared in a partnership between pastor and people; and negotiating such a partnership must include openness about emotional needs and supports.

They write from a Roman Catholic culture and experience, but much that they say can be translated, *mutatis mutandis*, into our Anglican culture. Allowing for the difference, e.g., that most Episcopalian clergy marry and have families, the ministerial culture still encourages the heroic in us, to the denial of our human needs. The effect on our families shows to a degree in the divorce rate among clerical families.

The Whiteheads concentrate on what the laity expect, but it is hard to sort out whether the theological association of the ordained person with God might have led to these expectations.

Many of us have learned that, as ministers and leaders, our job is to satisfy other people's needs. If a need arises, our duty is to respond. This heroic expectation is rooted in a distorted picture of the community: parental ministers exist to meet the children's needs. In such a world, ministers are trained to please the community, to keep everybody happy.<sup>12</sup>

Now, where did a priest learn that he/she must be responsible for everybody else's needs and happiness but not our own? Where did we learn that our role is parental and the people are like children? Perhaps we learned it partly from scripture (the image of God as parental and of Jesus as wise); partly perhaps we 'knew' it from our very call to follow Jesus in his ministry; but in practice we learned it in the training in ministry we received as we went to work in a parish, under the supervision of an experienced rector.

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<sup>12</sup>Whitehead and Whitehead (1991), p. 162.



The practical results of the heroic ideal in ministry is as good an argument against 'patriarchal theology' as any theoretical one. The heroic ideal cannot sustain our life, either our personal health or the church's common life. Eventually the price must be paid for it, and in terms of our personal life it will too often be exacted against our emotional health.

When a priest finds that his strength and virtue do not match this ideal, he tends to blame himself. Rather than questioning the distorted cultural image, the priest punishes himself for falling short. Feeling inadequate, he is likely to resist any conversation about needs.<sup>13</sup>

For the church the price will be paid in terms of passivity and dependency. We cannot think God will be pleased with such results!

A curate whose fortunes have led to a position under supervision in a less-than-positive relationship must learn to negotiate her/his needs with the rector. It is a hard lesson, but in so doing he/she will not only preserve and enhance her/his emotional health, but also will model for the church the struggle for partnership that must become the church's pattern of common life.

Partnership in an adult church depends on our participation. Authority in the community of faith is not simply what *they* do to the rest of us —whether we judge them to be good-hearted or malicious, enlightened or hopelessly out of touch. The rest of us are more than just beneficiaries or victims, more than simply observers of how religious authority functions. We are all active participants in authority.<sup>14</sup>

Obviously, the struggle for partnership in church life will not be a short or painless one, and we are all called into it. Conflict is a sore issue from the early days of supervision under a rector and on into later years of ordained ministry. Conflict management resolution, toward mutuality and partnership, needs to be part of our early and ongoing self-care.

#### F. Other Issues.

A batch of other issues came up for mention in the survey responses, some of which seem to merit inclusion here. One respondent, a bishop, begins with this observation and commitment, part of which has already been quoted:

"We need to start with people who can be formed! Formation of any sort depends

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 29.





on who the person is and what life experiences that person brings to the process. Then I feel the community we put them in is crucial — whether it is the seminary community or local training program. That community needs to be one that lives out the formation process.”

If the bishops, COMs, and seminaries really saw themselves in this program together, it would bid very well for the future of the Church. From where I sit, it looks as if there are many gaps.

In many ways, respondents to the survey signaled that there is a good deal of anxiety and anger around matters of ‘deployment.’ In the written responses there were several that focussed on knowing when one ought to move.

“Another area which I learned about a bit late was the dynamics of parish history. I was elected rector of a small parish whose previous rector had just retired after 26 years there. No one gave me any clues as to the dynamics of that kind of a situation, although there are plenty of clues to be found from the field of congregational studies. Sewanee’s parish field education program includes some work in congregational studies and I suspect that students who have acquired some of those analytical tools are less likely to be surprised as I was when I discovered that I really couldn’t stay in that parish for more than three years.”

Another said:

“Twice I have followed a priest who stayed too long, got trapped, got sick and became ineffective. When this happens, the incumbent suffers, the parish suffers, and the successor suffers.”

And another:

“It would have been helpful to have clear guidelines on when one is expected to move, needs to move, and the professional and personal issues attached to same.”

Is it too much to expect the bishop to be aware of these facts of parish history, and to be ready with the apt word of advice at the right time? Perhaps it should be the job of the Canon to the Ordinary to keep track of such things, and keep in touch with the clergy.

Appropriately, the next respondent brings up the issue of dependence.

“Seminary, I think, encouraged us to expect that the Church would ‘take care of us.’ In other words, it encouraged dependency. It didn’t take long in the field to learn otherwise. Bishops don’t ‘tend flocks’; they administer dioceses and travel. Vestries don’t ‘care for’ clergy; they resist leadership, stifle new vision and work hard to control their key employees. Parishioners engage in counter-dependency and transference, while speaking the language of family. I don’t feel bitter about this. It was a surprise, but I soon realized that the parish is a setting where people’s deepest needs and dysfunctions come into play.”



This respondent is astute to realize early the dynamics of church life on its different levels. He is slightly jaded and cynical but we have all come, early or late, to know whereof he speaks. I don't know that seminary encouraged dependency in us, as he says, though seminary may have been the locus of our becoming aware of dependency feelings. A difficulty with our position as parish clergy is that we are put upon by so many conflicting parties, so we must develop a healthy autonomy with regard to both diocesan judicatories and our parishioners. Another respondent also draws attention to this latter side of the issue:

"I have learned the hard way that people lead difficult lives and that they act out those difficulties, often in destructive ways, at church. Being a healthy, capable and functional parish priest is inherently a lonely job. One had better have a high tolerance for loneliness (not 'lone ranger-ness') and for conflict."

Finally, one respondent brought up prayer and spiritual formation. It is interesting that these got so little attention in most of the responses.

"The other area of ministry formation which has been important to me is prayer. It is one of those things which should go without saying — but the assumption is that clergy ought to be the experts on prayer which is seldom the case. My particular form is centering prayer; but I assume any regular form (and the key is regular) would work. If careful in prayer we spend time listening to the voice [actions] of God in our lives and helps us in being honest with ourselves.

"What I have found lacking in the preparation for ministry was any kind of real spiritual formation other than the worship of the church. This is only something I have picked up on in the last 5 - 7 years and I am not really sure I would have taken advantage of it as a younger person. As I have come to recognize my limitations ... I have come to realize dependence upon God is a good thing."

The opportunities available to seminarians for learning to pray and for spiritual direction are greater today than in earlier days. The opportunities are available, but seminarians must take responsibility to make use of them. If clergy are to be versed not only in theology but prayer and spiritual life, then they need to be people who will take the opportunities to learn these. As another respondent says, "We need to start with people who can be formed! Formation of any sort depends on who the person is and what life experiences that person brings to the process." Spiritual direction must begin with the raw material of who the person is and what life experiences she or he brings to the preparation for ministry.





People do expect clergy to be able to teach them about prayer. Furthermore, in the ministry of word and sacrament, they do assume the priest has an inner spiritual life with the God whose word and sacraments these are. For a priest, there must be an inner life that inheres in a regular dealing in the things of God, and therefore we are bound to pursue a life of spiritual discipline and ongoing conversion to fulfill our vocation with integrity.

Finally, one respondent tersely describes his learnings:

“What I learned the hard way? #1 that I’m not Superman and don’t have to be. I do not have to carry the burden by myself. #2 Don’t allow [my]self to get emotionally involved, to be more aware of my vulnerability. However, these are ‘head/heart’ issues. You can perfectly understand something intellectually and still be emotionally at risk. ... We never discussed personal, emotional vulnerability in seminary. So I thought I was prepared to handle anything. OR, I never thought that I could or would get emotionally involved.”

### **III. Continuing Life-Care.**

The issues of continuing self-care beyond the critical first years of ministry are more general. We all got on with our lives, got special skills and experience, and pursued those opportunities for ministry that were offered or we sought out according to the way we saw ourselves. The same can be expected of any new generation of clergy.

Certain points need emphasis for this period, however, if only to say what we all know and not leave them out. These are: the continuing need for education, for spiritual direction, and for growing autonomy.

The first point is that we can never consider ourselves beyond the formation process. Continuing education is necessary, spiritual growth is necessary. One respondent wrote:

“The formation process never ends and opportunities for it through spiritual retreats, continuing education, and especially through a community of clergy must be available all through one’s active years.”

And another wrote:

“Finally, regular continuing education experiences, from the College of Preachers to weekends of Jungian psychology have been a regular part of my life.”

Secondly, we need the ongoing nurture and self-care of spiritual direction.



During the years when the program of life is the consolidation of the ego-consciousness and the building of a life in the world, one may not feel much need for a spiritual companion. If there is peer support and collegiality, that may serve for spiritual companionship in these years.

When people reach their late thirties, however—or sometime later perhaps—there is the need for more intentional relationship and companionship in the spiritual journey. Levinson advocates a mentor relationship, somewhat like the relationship with a mentor one had (or should have had) in early adult life. For clergy, this might be a senior priest or retired priest.

When persons are in their late thirties, they are helped by mentors to move toward individuation, the process of becoming more their own persons. . . . Developmentally, mentor relationships are significant because they provide situations in which the recipients can identify with someone who embodies qualities which they themselves desire.<sup>15</sup>

At this period of life, the transition toward the mid-life change of focus begins, and the companionship of someone older will be helpful.

Finally, in the early years of ministry most of us have felt ourselves to be dependent on the Church, the bishop, the 'deployment office' and such people and offices who were 'over' us and could help us or neglect us. Many of us who have suffered a crisis of some kind—and some who may not—have learned that we cannot afford to be in that dependency mode. We have to cultivate autonomy, for our own health and the health of the church we serve. It is true that we cannot do everything ourselves, we cannot make our own luck entirely, we are dependent to a degree. On the other hand, we do make some of our luck, and that is by caring for ourselves; we do help ourselves by developing autonomous lives. Only by caring for ourselves can we develop the interdependence that is the relationship we should have, both toward judicatories and toward our parishioners.

One respondent reflects that

"both crises helped me (and help me) to see myself apart from the jobs which I have had. It has been wonderful to realize that I can think about and pursue positions different from the present one. When I came to the realization that I didn't have to

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<sup>15</sup>Studzinski (1985), pp. 48-49.





be a parish priest, and, more recently, that I could be a parish priest, I took that as a gift. ... I have also experienced a deepening of my sense of God's presence and providence during this most recent crisis. Having found the Church to be less than dependable, I have learned to turn more to God."

We recall the statement of a woman priest who learned through crisis and struggle that "...the Church will never be the mother that I didn't have in my youth—in fact, she's more the mother that I did have: consuming, insensitive, all-encompassing. The best mother I'm ever going to have is me."

A healthy autonomy leading to a proper relationship of interdependence with our parishioners will be able to set and keep limits. One respondent lists as one of the things he learned the hard way

"Control of schedule—that is, the ability to say NO. This seems to be learned 'by the seat of the pants,' and perhaps there is no other way. But nobody says anything about it—one is given the impression that a 'good' pastor always says 'Yes.'"

Thus we come back to the matter of building partnership rather than perpetuating the old heroic model of parental clergy. This is a good place to end this chapter, because this struggle for partnership is a journey toward maturity for both ourselves and the church people among whom we minister.



## Chapter 4. Conclusions.

My experience on my journey, with reflection and study, together with the generous responses of many clergy to my survey, lead me to some conclusions.

### I. Clergy in Mid-Life

First, I hope that bishops and clergy—and laity as well—will understand that the mid-life transition is of great importance to the ministry. It is a change of focus, from the ego-centred perspective of early adult life to the more holistic perspective of the second journey. In a culture such as ours, which places value on youth, this other perspective may seem alien but is much needed. Our culture pursues the program of the first journey and finds aging difficult to tolerate, but desperately needs the balance and humaneness of the second journey perspective. There is no reason that clergy who by passing through this transition should not become of much greater value to ministry in Church and society—except in a Church that is youth-oriented and spiritually taken in by the corporate world's approach to life.

It is not so much a waning vigor—the loss of youth—that changes the pace of a person's work in the second journey; it is more a sense of finitude, a recognition of limits, and a growing preference for being over doing. 'Parish programs'—conceived in the world's terms as 'units of production' that justify our breathing, eating, and taking money—may suffer from this different attitude to life. Ministry, however, as leading the people of God to view their lives as gifted and valued in and of themselves, is enhanced.

On the way to that renewal of life in the second journey, the transition can come as a shock. It may manifest itself as crisis in the conditions of life, or employment, or professional confidence. In the lives and souls of clergy, such a crisis can have very serious dimensions. It can affect a priest in that inmost domain of personal faith, on which hangs self-worth as well as professional effectiveness. Often the circumstances





of personal and professional life which occasion or cause or accompany the interior crisis could be disastrous by themselves. When the crisis of faith and vocation is already sapping the person's resources of energy and vitality, we have a situation that calls for wise and compassionate help.

In Chapter 2 we read what a few respondents said about appropriate help for clergy in crisis. I contend that the Church has a role to play in taking care of its ministers—caring for the care-givers—because they are sisters and brothers in Christ, as well as because the interests of effective ministry are thereby served.

The issue of giving and receiving care, however, has the same ambiguity regarding the Church's care of clergy as clergy are surely familiar with in the exercise of ministry with laity. That is, clergy must not expect the bishop or other clergy—or anyone else—to care for them in the sense of taking from them their responsibility for their actions and their caring for themselves. (We have only one Savior, and he saves us from sin and death, not from life.) None of us would like to see the clergy become more dependent or passive. 'Help,' therefore, must be appropriate to each person, and aim to promote personal authenticity, autonomy and spiritual freedom in interdependence.

I do not assume that other clergy are or will be affected in the same way I have been. The interior desolation may not be felt as deeply by others, the external circumstances may not be as frightful. Yet, to the extent that others may be wounded, frightened, discouraged or worn out, they need the kinds of help that are appropriate to their situation.

From the survey responses and my experience I draw three headings under which to consider appropriate kinds of help: collegial support, practical help, and spiritual help (meaning therapy or spiritual direction or both).

#### A. Collegial Support

"Most of all they need a community that recognizes crises and shares the hope of God's love," wrote one respondent. When crisis erupts, it is too late to build firm bridges across our isolation; but there often are latent possibilities of companionship



that need only be grasped. When clergy enter a period of crisis, they need compassion and understanding from their peers. The problem of isolation and competitiveness interferes with our care for each other in the relationship of peers. A sense of collegiality, with the shared understanding that we are engaged in a profession that can be hazardous, can avoid the worst effects of a priest losing self-esteem—which is an especially acute suffering in some kinds of crisis.

Obviously, the time to build community and collegiality is during the relatively quiet periods. Relationships of trust and respect that we have nurtured can be of great comfort in times of turmoil. The building of collegiality and community is the responsibility of clergy ourselves first, and also of the bishops as both encouraging and setting the working atmosphere in their dioceses.

Diocesan clergy hold periodic gatherings or retreats, and these can be occasions for building community and collegiality. Along with many others, I am guilty of taking a detached attitude to these—the program is only of peripheral interest, I may be too busy when the time comes, I don't like the late-night bull sessions with posturing clergy, and so on. Perhaps this resistance, which feeds our isolation from each other, needs to be addressed directly by the bishop and the organizers of the retreat. It needs to be taken into account in both the publicity for the event and in planning what happens in the event itself. In any case, building a collegial appreciation of each other and our gifts is our responsibility, and the bishops must help set the tone.

Aside from such diocesan occasions, there are many occasions in which clergy gather together, and they can make many more. We must make the effort. The lives we save may be our own.

## B. Practical Help

A resource that matters a great deal is money. As health insurance, we can easily know what is available to us. For other emergencies, the bishop may be the nearest source we can appeal to for funds, and we need to know that we will be received with a modicum of charity. We all know that money will be a prime consideration in making our choices and helping ourselves. We need willing assistance from our bishops.





If the job goes bad, clergy and their families may need somewhere to go while they look for another job. We all know this is not a matter of a couple of weeks: the job search is a full-time occupation and takes months to do. Meanwhile there are family matters that must be considered—spouse's job, children's school arrangements, and so on. The family is already under stress and does not need any more.

A priest whose job is terminating probably has need of financial resources to cover living costs until another job is found. This may also call for some astute, sensitive and informed financial counseling. Some bishops have considerable financial resources available in their discretionary accounts, others do not. It helps a priest deal with his or her circumstances to know that the bishop is supportive and willing to do what is possible.

The smartest thing—or sometimes the only thing—a priest can do about employment may be to take an assessment of his or her skills and aptitudes and seek a job in the secular world. Given the 'gridlock' of clergy at present—which is not going away soon and may not for a long while—one is forced to be realistic. Bishops and clergy can help by not regarding this as failure, as 'apostasy,' or as a winnowing of another misfit. The attitude we countenance and perpetuate among clergy, which is an 'in-group' attitude and somewhat 'elitist' but at bottom may be defensive, needs to be addressed by bishops and clergy. Creative ways of including clergy who are in secular employment must be found: they need to be included in clergy gatherings and they need to be used in the parishes. At bottom it is an attitude problem among clergy. Many of us need to re-examine our theology of the 'call'—and probably the best forum would be in committed, 'down-and-dirty' discussions with priests in secular employment.

In time of crisis a priest may need professional counseling to help him or her identify and deal with personal dimensions and gaps in the mental health area. The ecclesiastical judicatory should make sure that financial resources are available, adequate to support a counseling regimen for an extended time if necessary. Medical insurance plans must include this item so that everybody knows it is within reach. If addiction is part of the problem (it never is the whole problem), then treatment in a program for ad-



diction—preferably in a residential treatment center—must be available on the insurance plan, along with extended counseling when that is needed.

### C. Spiritual Help

In the survey responses we read that clergy need help to face and not avoid their problems, their questionings, their competitiveness. They need to learn to work together as colleagues. In time of crisis, they need help naming the crisis. All this, it seems to me, translates into spiritual direction. In Chapter 3, I said that spiritual direction (or companionship) in some form is a necessity in the formation process and an ongoing necessity throughout the years of ministry. I said that spiritual direction and psychotherapy are not necessarily far apart, that especially in time of crisis they may go hand in hand, and that spiritual direction often needs to be as tough and as insistent as therapy is.

Spiritual companionship is all the more important in the particular spiritual sufferings that can come in mid-life. We recall that mid-life is often a time when one suffers losses that signal that life hereafter will be different. We must learn to grieve well and quickly. We may spend extended periods in the spiritual desert, enduring darkness and doubt. We will probably benefit from having a companion with whom we can share our inner experience, and out of the sharing new directions for our future can emerge. It is not necessarily that we need a guide, one who knows the way and can lead through the darkness—in any case, each one's journey is his or her own, the sights and the obstacles may be different from those the companion encountered. The companionship of someone who can be trusted deeply, however, is invaluable.

The companion must be a person who is sensitive to what is happening. Because of the particular temptations of mid-life, he or she must be a person who has successfully done the work of her/his own midlife transition. Without that experience, the companion will not understand much of the mid-life trial. It is a work of great sensitivity and charity, this companionship of the spirit, to stay with souls in the desert trials of mid-life.

Since we admit that clergy are too often spiritually isolated from each other, ma-





king connections between individuals who could be helpful to each other as companions on the way is a problem. Is it useless to suggest that the bishop, the Canon to the Ordinary, or the Canon Pastor, or some other diocesan person, might be somebody who could keep an eye peeled for spiritual connections and affinities between clergy? In dioceses that are geographically wide-spread, it is harder to keep track of the spiritual condition of the clergy (I am thinking of Colorado, where I grew up; some other dioceses are even more spread out). In more compact dioceses the effort to keep track and make connections is not necessarily pursued with more dedication. The point is, the feeling of being alone in our spiritual struggle feeds our isolation from other clergy. To know that somebody is interested in our spiritual welfare would go some way to mitigating that isolation.

## II. Sabbatical Leave

One practice that would be of great help to the mental and spiritual health of the clergy is the sabbatical leave. For clergy who are in the spiritual desert as well as for those who for the moment are not, the regular sabbatical would provide refreshment and rest. It would help avoid some of the worst of the desert experience and maintain a healthy distance from concerns of success or failure in the work situation.

More common in academic life, the sabbatical leave has been introduced in the Church in recent years. Still, it is not yet the standard that it should be. Dioceses and the national Church both should take it as a priority to make the concept an accepted standard among both laity and clergy. I mean that the laity need to understand that clergy get a sabbatical at regular intervals: it should be an article in the standard letter of call, and backed up by diocesan policy. Every priest in active ministry should have a sabbatical of five months (with a sixth month of vacation) in every seven year period, as an understood right.

Of course, lives do not actually follow a seven-year schedule—changes of employment, family circumstances, and other conditions intervene—so it should be the individual's option to reschedule. Special provision might be made for an extended



course such as an advanced degree, so that the time away could be spread out rather than all at once. The principle should stand, though, and parishes should be made to understand that it is a standard.

Many clergy do not appreciate the value of the sabbatical. Most especially, those work-horses who need it most are likely not to think they should take a sabbatical. But if the concept were to become standard, accepted by laity and clergy, and encouraged by the bishops, even some indispensable pastors would eventually take the idea.

In some dioceses, the application form for continuing education grants asks the applicant to outline his or her overall continuing education program and goals. The applicant is asked to explain how this course or event, for which the grant is to be used, fits into the overall plan and goal. This is all very business-like, and some applicants may have ready answers to these kinds of questions. I submit, however, that it tells against the mental and spiritual health of many clergy. It publishes the message to the clergy that their noses must be kept to the grind-stone (we don't give out money for frivolities!), and discourages their sense of being whole human beings.

Suppose, for example, that a priest has a love for Louis XIV furniture and would like some time off to study it in some concentrated way; suppose that a priest would like to spend some time with a master wood-carver or blacksmith, learning the craft; suppose a priest and his or her family would love to take a camper on an extended trip around the country. Why would these not qualify as suitable for the church's provision? Are they educational? Of course they are. Are they life-enhancing? Why not?

One survey respondent related that, at a time of crisis for him, his bishop sent him on an extended retreat, which proved to be the religious experience of his life (p. 54). The way he tells of this, we don't know whether he had financial help from his diocese—either for himself or his parish. This is another kind of leave, however, that would be difficult to place within the straitjacket of educational plans and goals. He needed it—what more could be asked?

After six years and more of labor in the vineyard—being on call at all hours, struggling with budgets and Vestries and recalcitrant parishioners, sometimes being





‘inspired’ but in most weeks reinventing the wheel for the Sunday sermon—every priest deserves a break. More than that, the priest needs to think of him- or herself as a human person, needs to change the routine of life for a while, needs to feel some different stimuli.

Financial arrangements are of great importance. The viability of the financial provision means the difference between success and failure of the sabbatical program. Few clergy are able to save up for a sabbatical. The annual vacation is often no more than just possible on a clergy salary. Parishes generally find themselves put out of joint to fund their own expenses when the rector takes a sabbatical, for they must provide for supply clergy while the rector is away. In most dioceses the funds available for continuing education of the clergy are not sufficient to cover the additional expenses of clergy sabbatical leaves. Still, where there is a will, there is a way. Whether through earmarked endowments, savings plans for parishes and clergy with some matching funds, or some other creative solutions, the sabbatical leave is to be made possible. The biggest hurdle is for all of us to understand that it is highly valuable in the overall interest of good ministry.

In my case, I would have loved to take a sabbatical long before it was virtually enforced by circumstances. The main factors that prevented me were: I could not see where the money would come from; my working-class parish was on a long decline—since before I came to it—and I knew the underground powers would resent any expenditure for my benefit; I could not imagine being away from my family for months at a time, and because of the financial problems did not regard it worth trying to work out some creative solution to that. Sabbatical leave is still not commonly accepted as a standard practice, even among clergy, so I regarded it as a ‘luxury’ I would have to do without. This kind of self-denial did nothing to help my self-esteem. If diocesan policy had made it standard—with some financial help included, I would have had some ground to stand on with my Vestry.

I can relate that, with help from the diocesan continuing education funds, my family and I had a two-week trip to Norway—a longed-for ‘roots’ trip for me—eight years ago. As short as it was, it was a great refreshment for us, and life-enhancing.



Bishops and others involved in creating diocesan policy, therefore, should make the sabbatical leave a standard of policy, including a creative way of working out the financial arrangements.

### III. Spiritual Companionship

At several junctures and in many passages in these pages I have advocated the discipline of spiritual direction as a need that ministers have throughout the years of active ministry. I have often substituted the term 'spiritual companionship,' which it seems to me more adequately suggests what it really is. 'Direction' suggests a relationship of master to disciple rather than one of peers.

I maintain that in some matters the spiritual companion needs to be insistent, even challenging. There is an area of concern in which spiritual companionship and psychological counseling overlap. This includes anger, power, parental relations, sexuality, and so on. The spiritual companion should be prepared to enter that area and explore it at least part way. If referral to psychotherapy is then called for, let it be done; but the spiritual dimension of it has been claimed and can be maintained. Even in these sensitive matters, though, companionship along the way is a better model for the relationship than 'direction.'

I have advocated the provision for spiritual companionship during the mid-life transition (pp. 37f.), in the years of formation in ministry (pp. 73ff.), and in the years in between—if any (pp. 85f.). There are many ways, modes and formats in which spiritual companionship can be offered and received. It may be in the form of a one-on-one relationship, a friendly lunch once a month or some such arrangement; but it may also take the form of a peer group that meets with some regularity and is doggedly intentional about why it meets. In such a group setting, members learn to be caring of each other—spiritual companions of each other—including how and when to challenge each other. These matters were discussed on pp. 78ff.

For some modes of spiritual companionship, such as leadership of a peer support group, compensation of the leader is a virtual necessity (I discussed this on p. 79).





It is often hard work, and needs to be recognized as not only hard but valuable service. In a capitalist economy, money signals value both to the payor and payee. The Church almost always gets by on the cheap, to our frequent disservice and disadvantage. How this compensation is provided for is a matter of local option and creativity, but dioceses should be prepared to support it in some measure.

It is true that clergy must take responsibility for their spiritual welfare, including seeking out appropriate spiritual companions. I claim, though, that there are not enough ministers (lay or clerical) who are adequately trained in this ministry. My experience is that it is far too casual. Some clergy are known to be practiced at it, and are in more demand than they can reasonably take. Most of those could benefit from more training, and more clergy (and laity) could be trained in it; a diocese would do well to foster this ministry with encouragement and financial help.

#### **IV. Formation**

In Chapter 3 we saw what quite a few clergy had to say about formation, most of them from the vantage point of many years' experience. Many responses to the questions on formation were very thoughtful and insightful.

Job-placement in the first positions after ordination is clearly a matter for concern. Not one voice was heard in favor of placing the newly ordained in the lonely rural missions (pp 65, 67). Generally we favor working with a senior priest, although some serious reservations were expressed. The necessity of a mentor for the newly ordained is agreed (pp. 63ff.), but the mentoring needs to be 'open and honest' (p. 63). We all know that the rector we work for may not be suitable for that kind of mentoring relationship. So one respondent called for some kind of creative arrangement drawing on the talents and experience of senior clergy (p. 66).

Some of the issues that were identified to be addressed in the course of formation were: stewardship of time and life (pp 69-72), addiction (pp 14f., 75f., 80), and conflict management and resolution (pp 80ff.). See also the survey (Appendix, page 108) under the first question of Part I: the "wish there had been" column is interesting.



## V. Finally—

The Church has a role to play in taking care for its ministers—caring for the care-givers. Appropriate care for the clergy at all stages of their active lives is the Church's duty because clergy are brothers and sisters in the human family, and sisters and brothers in Christ as well; it also serves the Church's interests of effective ministry. Appropriate care is exercised in the interest of the well-being of each member of the clergy at every stage. Those who exercise this care will be interested in getting them started in ministry in such a way that they will care for themselves while they minister to the people; interested in their well-being as they grow in their ministries; interested in their well-being especially in the years 35-45, which seem to be the years most likely to experience crisis (see Appendix, page 110)—or in any case, whenever they find themselves in the desert experience. Appropriate care for the clergy will always mean aiming to leave their freedom intact, but will offer suggestions and opportunities, and encourage interdependence and collegiality among the clergy. People tend to treat others as they perceive themselves to be treated. It generally can be expected that clergy will be loving and caring to the people in their parishes as they perceive they are loved and cared for by the Church they serve and love.





## Epilogue.

### Hope for the Future

In the depths of the “dark wood” experience mid-way in the course of our life, there is little hope that better days are ahead. We are at least intermittently occupied with getting through this day or this week, and now and then we wonder if life will ever feel better than this.

Janice Brewi gives this succinct statement of the goal that lies before us:

“Individuation is becoming whole, reaching one’s full potential, and surrendering to the reasons for one’s very existence, one’s reason for being, one’s call.”<sup>1</sup> These are all happy terms, joyful terms. If the program of the second journey is individuation, or integration of the Self, then life should get better. Integration should be a progress toward happiness and joy, one should begin to feel more ‘at home’ with oneself than ever before, and at peace with God. If the journey begins in a crisis, the crisis is largely the shock of experiencing a change of course. It takes time, reflection and a growing self-awareness to get used to a changed point of view on life. The questions, Who am I? and What am I for? begin to be answered differently, but it was uncomfortable even to raise them again. Disorientation must precede reorientation. That was the cause of the crisis, but joy is to follow.

The survey question about where we are now, how things are better now, was the one to receive the least sustained attention. Perhaps not many of us are far enough through the crisis period to see the light. One who did respond, and does bask in light at least for the moment, says this:

Now, after all this, I’m also finding that the ... life that served me so well in the past, is no longer providing the nourishment that I now seek. I’m not sure how one starts..., but I’m open to the possibility of relationship that grows in commitment and intimacy. This is exciting to me.

...I’m very grateful for the opportunity to share with you in this way, especially as I see the light that is everywhere around me. Thank God the darkness is gone for

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<sup>1</sup>Brewi and Brennan (1989), p. 234.



now. I'm even having a wonderful time in my work—and working less! There are no eternal promises here, only: “the darkness is gone for now.” The past is recognized as no longer adequate, there is new life and openness to new love, there is even gratitude for the opportunity to respond to a questionnaire! I believe that signals growth and hope!

Another respondent declares his learnings:

I know that life is precious, that *my* life is precious and that as I care for myself, nurturing a balanced life of work and rest, aloneness and relationships, prayer and worship, I am more at peace with myself, my family and my work in the parish.

Renewed creativity? My preaching is now often ‘inspired,’ I’m told. I enjoy it, in fact I really love sharing the message of our Lord’s healing and love. I can truly give of myself in preaching and worship in a way I never could before.

It can sound trite, but “*my* life is precious” is a momentous learning. Coming out of a crisis of faith, the fires of temptation and trial, to realize not only that life—in general, as an abstraction—is precious but that *my* life is precious, is a revelation of grace.

Since my view of our priestly life has become much more holistic and sits more loosely to the ‘churchly’ aspect of it, I specifically encouraged respondents to declare new love, new creativity, new re-creative activities. I am somewhat saddened, therefore, that this respondent concentrated on ‘newness’ only in terms of ministry—specifically, preaching. I am glad that his preaching is better, that it is ‘inspired,’ and that he loves it. Still, I hope there is more to his life than that.

Another respondent also concentrated on his learnings for ministry:

This experience has had a number of effects on my ministry, as I perceive it to be. These include:

—Much greater sensitivity to those experiencing loneliness. I am less likely to dismiss the problem (“why not go the YWCA for a class?”) and less likely to somehow try to “fix” the problem. I tend now to try to let the person verbalize the feelings, and attempt an ‘active listening’ approach in response.

—Ability to help divorced persons seeking a new marriage in the Church. I virtually always reveal my own experience of having been divorced (by title, more or less—additional comment as seems to be helpful), and find that it puts people at greater ease, and makes pre-marital counseling a great deal easier for the divorced person(s) seeking a new start. It does NOT mean that I am uncritical as a pastor,





but simply that it takes away the 'I'm better than you are' tone which can occur (in reality or in people's feelings/perceptions of reality!) in the pre-marital process.

—Ability to relate to children from homes affected by divorce.

—Need to take care of myself, with a deeper awareness that when I am worn out and worn down, I can minister effectively with no one at all. Those nice words are more real to me than before.

—An appreciation of the very real support I received from one particular priest friend throughout, even as he was experiencing crises as well, and the courage of my bishop in being directive even as he was supportive. His involvement was limited, but came at a key moment and essentially protected my professional reputation.

These are all worthwhile learnings, and undoubtedly add to his effectiveness in ministry. There is no reason not to be glad that suffering has issued in a more sensitive and compassionate ministry. Still, as with the previous respondent, I hope there is more to this man's life than ministry, and that renewal has affected all of it.

The most extended reflection on the renewal of life after crisis is this one, which is truly heart-warming and full of hope:

Looking over my life, and the crisis times, puts me in focus, and there is so much that caused me pain and problems, and yet, I am grateful for it all. Grateful because it has brought me to the life I now have, unburdened by unreal expectations of myself and others, and also a clearer understanding as to what Grace and forgiveness are in relation to being very human.

I have also begun to understand the idea of Stewardship being a real gratitude for all the gifts God has given to us all in this life. People are given the gift of life to live and share with one another. How often we choose to abuse that trust when we are only seeking our own ideas as to the purpose of God. I no longer see just good or evil, but see, rather, the tragic in life. Even with the best of intentions, so often, evil is the product of our actions. Life is a gift, and ministry is being that gift to others. I listen more, and talk less. I put aside political ambitions to become God's agent wherever I am.

One other thing has changed, and that is I see the church from a greater vantage, not just the Episcopal church, but the greater Church. One of the amusing things is, as I thought back over the years, the groups that have really strengthened my faith were either secular or of clergy from other denominations! I am not just thinking about 'mainline' churches, but some from Charismatic and fundamentalist clergy. With these groups we came together with what we had in common, not on what we disagreed about.

My life took a turning point about two years ago when my wife and I received a call to ———, which is basically a mission field. I had been in ——— for 12 years,



and had about ten years left before retirement. We visited here about six years previously and fell in love with the country and the people. Two years ago we made the decision to come, and we have grown more and more aware of God's purpose. It is a risky operation, but it is better than forms and politics, for we are constantly reminded of the beauty of creation, and of the basic message of the gospel. It was a decision to go back to beginnings, we started out in a small mission in Montana. This is a place for mature ministry, to give balance to places that usually are stuck with people out of seminary who stay only a few years. Here God is putting to work all the knowledge, experience, and living, to do a new thing in his Creation.

Here I think we have a witness to wholeness, that integration of the personality toward which the soul strives. This man's life is coming together, the various strands and themes weaving together toward a sense of wholeness and a vision of God's gracious sovereignty. This is a man who is becoming whole, reaching his full potential, and surrendering to the reasons for his very existence, his reason for being, his call. This is not to say that there is no further development for this soul, only that he has attained a balance and a maturity that gives hope and promise to those with whom he ministers—including us who read his account. God is using this man—and his wife—to renew the creation.





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Questionnaire:  
Ministry Formation and Crisis in the Experience of Clergy (1991-92)  
Part I

This first sheet (both sides) can be filled out fairly quickly.

Please mail it back to me in the enclosed envelope.

And THANKS!

1) What constituted formation for ministry during your seminary years?

☐ An academic course

☐ Field work

☐ Other.

Specify \_\_\_\_\_

How did the Church help you get started on a healthy life of ministry during your first 3-to-5 years out of seminary?

	Available	I used this Resource	Not Available, but wish it had been
Mentoring by an experienced priest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diocesan program for newly ordained?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Specify \_\_\_\_\_

Was the bishop involved in any way?	Yes	No
Life-/time-management guidance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organized Peer Group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informal Peer Group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spiritual director	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other - please specify _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

On a scale of 1 (great) to 10 (terrible), how would you rate the help you got in learning to manage your life as a minister? (     )

2) All of us, whether young, middle-aged, or retired, have some experience of faith and vocation. For some of us this includes crisis. In one way or another, a seam or a tear opens in the fabric of life, calling us to deeper reflection or to a change in what we are doing with the only life we have. The specific ways this intrudes on our lives varies as widely as our personalities and circumstances; the following list is not for statistical purposes, but is intended only as a quick checklist, and may not include your experience of trial. Please consider telling the story of your experience, in Part II.

Please check as many of the following as may be in your personal story; identify primary crisis with 1 , secondary or following ones with 2 -

Struggle with alcohol or other drugs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marriage break-up	<input type="checkbox"/>
Needed to move and found the "system" unresponsive	<input type="checkbox"/>
Serious depression	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wondered if I believed anything at all	<input type="checkbox"/>
Left church ministry in some disillusionment	<input type="checkbox"/>





Some other, that you identify as a crisis\_\_\_\_\_

What age (range) were you around the time of crisis?

How many years had you been ordained?

3) (If you have been through a crisis experience, you are probably aware that the most sensitive part of it is what it comes to mean as a part of your life story. In fact, it is not fully human and personal until we can attribute meaning to it. The question of meaning is better dealt with in story form, and appears in **Part II** [second sheet]. I hope you will take the time to answer it.)

4) Please reflect on what is emerging after the crisis.  
Do you have different perspectives on life and ministry?  
Specify?

Do you have new tools for life and/or ministry?

Spiritual counselor

More work

Less work

What new or renewed creativity is showing up to manifest a renewal of life and grace?

Artistic/creative endeavor	new	reclaimed
painting/sculpture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
music	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
poetry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
writing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reading	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exercise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have a new or renewed love in your life?  
Say more?

Results with regard to job, and professional life?

Renewal for your prayer/spiritual life?

Additional comments on any of these matters?



Questionnaire:  
Ministry Formation and Crisis in the Experience of Clergy (1991-92)  
Part II

The first sheet of this inquiry is quickly completed, I hope. PLEASE SEND IT BACK RIGHT AWAY. This second sheet takes more time and reflection, and more writing.

*(Written responses give you maximum control to say only what you feel you want to say.)*

I hope that, if any part of it applies to you, you will take the time anyway. Your influence on the environment in which we work will be of more weight if you do.

(I hope you will complete and mail it **before New Years, 1992!**)

You may write out or type or use your word-processor for your responses, as may be most convenient to you. Please attach your papers to this page of questions and mail them back to me. And THANKS!

- 1) Thinking about how the Church helped you (or didn't) as you began a life of ministry:
  - a) Please give me the benefit of your recommendation for the formation of newly ordained clergy.
  - b) What specific issues have you had to learn the hard way, that somebody could have saved you pain and grief by helping you with early on?

2) All of us, whether young, middle-aged, or retired, have some experience of faith and vocation. For some of us this includes crisis. Some not-uncommon crises were listed in Part I of this inquiry. Now --

Please tell briefly the story of your experience --the shape of the crisis in the context of your life and ministry (what was it that happened?). And what was the impact on your marriage and family?

3) "Midway in the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost" (*Inferno*, Canto I). Dante's image suggests that many of us experience some form of crisis midway in our journey of this life. If this is your experience, you are probably aware that the most sensitive part of it is what it comes to mean as a part of your life story. In fact, it is not fully human and personal until we can attribute meaning to it.

- a) If this is your experience, what did it mean to you?
- b) In terms of your professional life, how did your crisis make you feel?
- c) How did your prayer/spiritual life fare through the crisis?
- d) What issues in your life did the crisis compel you to focus on (family of origin issues, feminist or male consciousness issues, self-esteem and self-care, other)?
- e) What frame(s) of reference helped you understand yourself and your suffering (e.g., Myers-Briggs personality types, 12-step program, other meaning system)?
- f) What are you doing about your issues, through or following the crisis?

*(continued overleaf)*





Regarding crisis management, as you experienced it:

	Intervenor	I agreed to this resolution	I disagreed with this resolution
Bishop	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wardens	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vestry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Counselor/therapist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other priest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spiritual director	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify)_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- g) Did you feel that the intervention was weighted more in favor of really helping/redeeming you, or more in the interests of the institution?
- h) Please give me the benefit of your recommendations for helping clergy deal with their crises (recognizing that crises are very individual).
- 4) Further reflections on what is emerging after the crisis, since you filled out Part I of this inquiry?
- a) What different perspectives do you have on life and ministry?
- b) What new or renewed creativity is showing up to manifest a renewal of life and grace?

Additional comments on any of these matters?

Please attach your papers to this page of questions and mail them back to me.

**THANKS! And GOD BE WITH YOU!**

If you have further comments to offer, you may call me collect at 617-547-2030.

Please mail this paper and your papers back to me:

**The Rev. James Knudson, 1 St John's Road, #1, Cambridge MA 02138.**



(Responses, both tabulated numbers and written-in comments, are given in bold type.)

## Part I

### 1.a) What constituted formation for ministry during your seminary years?

**40** An academic course

**56** Field work

**33** Other: **CPE - 7**

**model/mentor - 3**

**spiritual direction - 2**

**job - 1**

**wife - 1**

**a year of mentored lay work - 1**

**Order of St Anne - 1**

**Society of St Margaret - 1**

**Society of St John the Evangelist - 1**

**seminary - 6**

**summer work -3**

**intern year - 2**

**Leave of Absence - 1**

**health work - 1**

**therapy - 1**

**Pastoral Theology - 1**

### 1.b) How did the Church help you get started on a healthy life of ministry during your first 3-to-5 years out of seminary?

[In the following tabulation, results in the first two columns are compromised.

Some respondents checked both columns, some checked one or the other. To

clarify the difference between columns, the first column should have been headed,

“available (but I didn’t use it).”]

	Available	I used this Resource	Not Available, but wish it had been
Mentoring by an experienced priest	<b>33</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>16</b>
Diocesan program for newly ordained?	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>30</b>
Specify:	<b>parish development - 3</b>		<b>conflict resolution - 3</b>
	<b>internship - 4 (not helpful - 2)</b>		<b>Diocesan meetings - 3</b>
	<b>Recently Ordained Clergy program - 2</b>		<b>2-year program - 1</b>
	<b>new + experienced clergy meetings - 1</b>		<b>annual 1/2 day - 1</b>
	<b>monthly with Bp for Bible study - 1</b>		<b>Bp + deacons - 1</b>
	<b>visit from Archdeacon (not helpful) - 1</b>		

Was the bishop involved in any way?

**Yes - 15**

**No - 26**

Life-/time-management guidance	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>37</b>
Organized Peer Group	<b>14</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>28</b>
Informal Peer Group	<b>19</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>14</b>
Spiritual director	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>28</b>





Other - please specify\_\_\_\_\_

life experience - 1.	laity - 3
parish support group - 2	cursillo - 2
clergy clubs (not helpful) - 1	friends - 1
career counseling - 1	priest - 4
used AA sponsor - 1	therapy - 3
negative model - 1	
hard to know what was needed - 1	

On a scale of **1** (great) to **10** (terrible), how would you rate the help you got in learning to manage your life as a minister?

Rating	Number of responses
1 (great)	5
2	3
3	6
4	3
5	12
5 1/2!	1
6	7
7	0
8	14
9	4
10 (terrible)	6

2) Please check as many of the following as may be in your personal story -

	<u>primary</u>	<u>secondary</u>
Struggle with alcohol or other drugs	7	4
Marriage break-up	14	3
Needed to move and found the "system" unresponsive	9	10
Serious depression	4	10
Wondered if I believed anything at all	3	9
Left church ministry in some disillusionment	7	5
Some other, that you identify as a crisis_____	19 responses	

lost job - 5	financial trouble - 3
parish/clergy friction or power struggle - 3	burn out - 1
vocational questions - 1	identity of priest - 1
moved out of rectory - 1	death of a child - 1
getting away from "spiritual roots" - 1	having baby - 1
aging parents (move to nursing home) - 1	



What age (range) were you around the time of crisis?

25-30:	4	
30-35:	10	
35-40:	16	} This period from age mid-30's to mid-40's appears to be the time of greatest liability.
40-45:	18	
45-50:	6	
50-55:	5	
55—	3	

How many years had you been ordained?

0-5: 12; 5-10: 14; 10-15: 9; 15-20: 10; 20-25: 4; 25-30: 4.

[This question seems to have been rendered useless by many respondents misreading it to mean how many years they *have now* been ordained. Comparing age at time of crisis and number of years ordained, on the same response, makes non-sense in many cases.]

3) [The question of meaning is better dealt with in story form, and appears in **Part II.**]

4) Please reflect on what is emerging after the crisis.

Do you have different perspectives on life and ministry? "yes" - 28

Specify? 37 comments:

took work outside church - 11

more compassionate - 3

know I will survive, with patience and faith - 2

stopped taking responsibility for everyone else - 2

take responsibility for self and own behavior - 2

more open to my needs - 2

sense of humor - 2

Jesus Christ, spiritual renewal - 1

learning detachment from results - 1

new appreciation of God and people - 1

converted to personal faith in Jesus Christ - 1

God-centred rather than Church-centred - 1

more honest with self and others - 1

know that ministry can become an idol - 1

setting limits & truth-telling are part of health - 1

need to be doing something other than parish ministry - 1

more mature - 1

learned not to avoid conflict - 1

became open to receiving help - 1      vital to have support - 1





Do you have new tools for life and/or ministry?

- 15** Spiritual counselor
- 12** More work
- 8** Less work
- 6** changed jobs
- 3** therapy
- 1** NOT more work
- 1** friends outside parish

What new or renewed creativity is showing up to manifest a renewal of life and grace?

Artistic/creative endeavor	new	reclaimed	
painting/sculpture	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	
music	<b>2</b>	<b>16</b>	[ dance - 1 ]
poetry	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	
writing	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>	
Reading	<b>7</b>	<b>24</b>	
Exercise	<b>13</b>	<b>22</b>	

Do you have a new or renewed love in your life?

Say more? **26** comments:

**new marriage - 12; renewed marriage - 6; family - 2; nature - 1;**  
**scripture - 2; value present moment - 2; ready for it - 1.**

Results with regard to job, and professional life? **18** comments:

- improved, healthier - 3**
- happier in present position - 3**
- new opportunities - 2**
- Interim Ministry - 1**
- work in parish revitalization - 1**
- more focussed on job, more time off - 1**
- more willing to allow failure w/o feeling personally - 1**
- responsible - 1**
- courage to search -1**
- decided will not work for someone else again - 1**
- human services work far more rewarding - 1**
- "It saved my professional and personal life" - 1**
- found my place as military chaplain - 1**



Renewal for your prayer/spiritual life? 28 comments:

“Yes” - 12

“No” - 4

deepening - 2

more relaxed - 1

serious practice of prayer - 1

less structured - 1

meditation through nature - 1

contemplation - 1

longer retreats - 1

nurture inner life - 1

Cursillo, Fifth Step ministry - 1

got over anger at God - 1

doctoral course on spirituality and self-care - 1

## Part II

1) Thinking about how the Church helped you (or didn't) as you began a life of ministry:

a) Please give me the benefit of your recommendation for the formation of newly ordained clergy.

b) What specific issues have you had to learn the hard way, that somebody could have saved you pain and grief by helping you with early on?

[The responses to these questions provided many useful insights and suggestions, and are quoted in the text.]

2) All of us, whether young, middle-aged, or retired, have some experience of faith and vocation. For some of us this includes crisis. Please tell briefly the story of your experience --the shape of the crisis in the context of your life and ministry (what was it that happened?). And what was the impact on your marriage and family?

[The stories that came in response to this request are quoted at length in the text. I am indebted to those who took the time and effort to respond.]

3) “Midway in the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost” (*Inferno*, Canto I). ....

a) If this is your experience, what did it mean to you?

b) In terms of your professional life, how did your crisis make you feel?

c) How did your prayer/spiritual life fare through the crisis?

d) What issues in your life did the crisis compel you to focus on (family of origin issues, feminist or male consciousness issues, self-esteem and self-care, other)?

e) What frame(s) of reference helped you understand yourself and your suffering (e.g., Myers-Briggs personality types, 12-step program, other meaning system)?

f) What are you doing about your issues, through or following the crisis?

[The generously offered reflections on this set of questions are given in the text.]





Regarding crisis management, as you experienced it: ...

[This check-list apparently did not strike the respondents as meaningful. Very few bothered with it at all, and the net result is no information.]

- g) Did you feel that the intervention was weighted more in favor of really helping/redeeming you, or more in the interests of the institution?
- h) Please give me the benefit of your recommendations for helping clergy deal with their crises (recognizing that crises are very individual).

[Such comments as responded to these questions were imbedded in the general comments submitted, and are used as appropriate in the text.]



A Bibliography Prepared  
for  
the Association of Episcopal Field Education Directors

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February, 1992.

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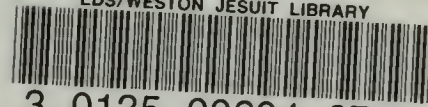












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